

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

This research report seeks to discursively explore the perceptions of domestic violence among a select group of Muslims in Johannesburg. Its purpose is to raise questions about how the intersecting elements of religious, cultural and gender power constitute understandings of gender based violence among Muslims in Johannesburg. An article by Ruzwana Bashir, a British Muslim feminist, published in *The Guardian* on 29 August 2014 raised critical questions about gender violence. In the article, '*The untold story of how a culture of shame perpetuates abuse. I know, I was a victim*', Bashir discusses and addresses sexual abuse and its meanings in the Muslim community in Britain to which she belonged. She criticises the Rotherham report, a report on appalling child sexual abuse, for omitting the fact that reporting rates of domestic violence incidents were low in Muslim communities. She herself was a victim of the kind of abuse identified in the Rotherham report. At 18 years of age Bashir received an offer to study at Oxford University and at the age of 28 she returned to her community and spoke out about the abuse she had endured as a child. Bashir states:

When I first told my mother about the abuse I'd suffered, she was absolutely devastated. The root of her anger was clear: I was heaping unbound shame onto my family by trying to bring the perpetrator to justice. In trying to stop him from exploiting more children, I was ensuring my parents and my siblings would be ostracised. She begged me not to go to the police station. (Bashir, 2014:1).

Bashir adds that if she were still living with her family in the community, she might have agreed to her mother's wishes as she was "surrounded by a community who would either blame me for the abuse or label me a liar" (2014:1). Bashir notes that her testimony gave some the courage to speak up about the abuse they had endured. However, this was not the case for all who were abused, as many chose to remain silent and not testify. As Bashir noted, they would be "alienated and ostracised by their own families and by the whole community, if they go public with allegations of abuse" (Bashir, 2014:1). In addition, they and their families would be stigmatised. Bashir stresses that this problem is not a religious one; rather it is cultural, "it's about a culture where notions of shame result in the blaming of victims rather than perpetrators" (Bashir, 2014:1). She hopes that the testimonies will force community leaders to speak about sexual and physical abuse "[t]he report also presents an opportunity to overhaul the public institutions that have failed in their responsibility to

protect the defenceless – which includes everyone from the police to schools to social services” (Bashir, 2014:1).

Bashir’s (2014) words resonated with my interest in how domestic violence is constructed in Muslim communities elsewhere and emphasises its global importance. Her words intersect with concern for the alarming rate of domestic violence in South Africa. Research estimates that one in four women are in abusive relationships (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002:1231). The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) (2010:1) argues that ‘51.2% of women in the Gauteng region have experienced some form of emotional, physical and sexual abuse in their lifetime, and 78.3% of men in the province admitted to committing some form of violence against women’. The fact that almost half of the female population in Gauteng alone have been abused is a clear reflection that an essential and ‘radical shift in men’s attitudes’ needs to take place (Rakoczy, 2004:34). A change in our culture as well as the manner in which we value women needs to change as well. There has been lot of research on domestic violence in South Africa; however, there is a dearth of specific research on domestic violence in Muslim communities in Johannesburg and how it is perceived and dealt with.

My concern in this research report is with the lack of open discussion and debate on domestic violence in Muslim communities. The research thus explores how domestic violence is viewed and is understood and tries to analyse the constitution of social power and authority that shapes how people respond to the issue. In particular I am interested in how what is seen to belong to the public as distinct from the private realm is conceived. In this respect, I draw upon the analyses of Kelly (2003) and Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld (2005), among others. The question of how domestic violence is conceived and understood will be addressed in the theoretical framework.

In my experience of social media, television and conversations on the internet in the form of online articles, blogs, Twitter and Facebook, as well as among my peers, friends and family members, there is a societal concern about how domestic violence is viewed by individuals and communities, in particular among Muslims. How is domestic violence defined and understood? Is it seen as a private matter, one that should be hidden from public scrutiny? Given the development of legislation in recent years to deal with domestic violence, is it now conceived as a public issue, one that should be criminalised and dealt with by the criminal justice system? At another level, how do ordinary people conceive of domestic

violence? Who is blamed for its incidence? Is it the case that victims are blamed and are there assumptions that the perpetrator's actions were provoked and therefore justified? What role does shame play in the construction of the debate? In this research report my objective is to analyse the ways in which domestic violence is viewed in the Muslim community. Since this is merely a short report, the study was undertaken among select Muslims in Johannesburg.

In addressing the issue of domestic violence through the prism of a single case study, the aim is to provide a deeper understanding of the 'politics of privacy' (Kelly, 2003). A close enquiry, a case study, of a group of Muslims in Johannesburg would provide a base-line for further research. Thus, the questions that form the focus of this research are: How do people from the Muslim community and of different ages understand domestic violence? Do they know of the existence of the South African Domestic Violence Act (DVA) of 1998? How prevalent do they believe domestic violence to be in their own community? Do individuals deem it appropriate to keep incidences of domestic violence a 'private', family matter or would they encourage victims to seek help from elsewhere. If they do encourage victims to seek help, to whom do they suggest people turn? By asking questions in this way, I hope to understand the way in which discursive constructions of domestic violence shape the power and agency of possible victims of abuse to seek help.

This research will attempt to shed light on what shapes the understanding of domestic violence. One objective is to understand the role, if any, that religion and culture play in the discourse around domestic violence. It asks who, if anyone, is blamed for gender based violence. It asks if a similar shaming culture to which Bashir (2014) refers to exists. Another aspect of the report is to undertake a discursive and textual analysis of the interviews, in an attempt to bring to the surface the nature of gender power relations in the community under scrutiny. Thus, this study hopes to contribute to a debate about domestic abuse, its recognition and to promote critical dialogue about how to overcome domestic violence. It aims not only to interrogate how domestic violence is understood but also how it is located in the community.

1.1. Research Questions:

What are the perceptions of domestic violence among Muslims in Johannesburg? How do members of Muslim congregations of Johannesburg understand and define gendered

violence? And what do they consider to be domestic violence? How do Muslim individuals in Johannesburg understand the politics surrounding the notion of privacy versus security? How would victims of domestic violence be advised by Muslims in Johannesburg to deal with the situation? Who would give advice? Would they be advised to seek help and if they were, to whom would they turn for help?

1.2. Rationale:

I believe this area of study is important for two main reasons. First, from my various interactions and understanding it is my perception that domestic violence takes place within Muslim households in South Africa as much as it does elsewhere. However, people do not speak openly about the issue of domestic abuse. The literature which I discuss below points to low reporting rates as well as to the fact that women remain with their abusive partners. What lies behind this situation? The research investigates the views of a small but diverse group of Muslims, including men and women of different ages, on the issue. An important reason for undertaking this study was, apart from making a contribution to the literature, to encourage greater openness and a willingness to discuss this topic in Muslim communities.

1.3. Chapter Outline:

Chapter One is the introductory chapter and discusses why this topic has been chosen. Chapter Two, the literature review, critically engages with various perspectives regarding domestic violence both at a local and international level. It begins with a discussion about the Domestic Violence Act and the statistics of domestic violence in a South African and global context. It then goes on to address the notions of the public and private. I begin with the concept of the Sexual Contract in an attempt to enunciate the role patriarchy plays in shaping the experiences of women. Thereafter, I use the arguments of Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld (2005) to debunk the idea that Western theories shape the public and private in the South African context. This chapter addresses the importance of intersectionality in exploring the experience of domestic violence – not everyone experiences domestic violence in the same way because of the differences of culture, class, ethnicity and generation, among other variables. Lastly, this chapter looks at explanations for why women remain with their abusive partners.

In Chapter Three I discuss the methodology and methods used to conduct this research. A qualitative method was used by combining a feminist theoretical and empirical approach to the research conducted. In this chapter I begin with a discussion of feminist knowledge production, feminist methodology and textual analysis. Following this discussion, I discuss the use of individual interviews and focus groups in the investigation of the perceptions of domestic violence. Thereafter, I reflect on the limitations, my positioning and situatedness and the ethical issues surrounding this research. Lastly, this chapter discusses the theoretical framework which is broadly based on feminist theories. In particular I discuss how the notions of power, discourse and hegemony have assisted my research.

Chapter Four discusses the various interpretations of the key chapter and verse in the Qur'an, Chapter 4 Verse 34. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss domestic violence within an Islamic context. I begin with a discussion on the background of the Qur'an and its interpretations. This situates and attempts to explain the essence of violence in Islam. This chapter then discusses the various and different ideas and perceptions of the informants, all Muslims in Johannesburg with regard to this verse. At the same time, I attempt a textual analysis of my interviews to explore how my interview partners perceive domestic violence

In Chapter Five I address the significance of culture, education and socialisation for the conversation on domestic violence. In this discussion, I am concerned to understand the interrelationship of culture (including religion), ideology, and socialisation in shaping how people think and believe. The outcome is seldom critical reflection, but instead, a complete acceptance of 'the word' within the culture and religion – whether it is the word of God as found in religious texts, or the word of religious scholars and Imams.

Chapter Six begins with a more sustained discussion around the public and private realms. The research participants compartmentalised where they thought various forms of abuse take place. This chapter also addresses the question of blame and the manner in which my respondents explained the causes of domestic violence. This relates to the issue of a shaming culture as discussed by Bashir (2014). Lastly, this chapter discusses kinds of assistance available to survivors/victims of domestic abuse. Finally, Chapter Seven concludes this research report. It will provide an analytical synthesis as well as recommendations.

Chapter 2: Domestic Violence - International and National Debates

The South African Constitution advocates for equality on all levels and amongst all individuals, asserting that “the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth” (South African Constitution, 2.9.3). The chapter that follows will identify and critically analyse some of the debates about domestic violence both at an international and local level.

While the debates about violence against women internationally were embedded within an assessment of the impact of gender inequality, there were very different national responses to dealing with the issue. In South Africa, organisations arose in the 1970s that focused on providing support for survivors – these came out of community support structures, and were led by volunteers (Meintjes, 2003). Meintjes shows how these voluntary associations began a process of seeking funding, often from international funders, and the effect was to change the nature of organisations – from community based volunteers, to what came to be called ‘non-governmental organisations’ (NGOs). The process of ngo-isation led to much greater professionalisation among those working in the organisations – researchers, social workers, psychologists, and even lawyers were employed. Volunteers tended to fall away as the space was filled by these new organisations. This was particularly the case just before and after the transition to democracy, when the state, both the twilight apartheid state and the new democratic state, responded to the demands of women for appropriate legislation, policy and action to solve the very high levels of violence against women (Meintjes, 2003).

The chapter begins with a discussion about the outcome of the activism in the 1990s. First, the discussion starts with a review of the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) and the local context and linking that to the global movement against violence against women. It then goes on to explore how the academic literature approaches the notions of the public and private in political theory. In this discussion this report addresses the breakthrough made by Carole Pateman in her work *The Sexual Contract* (1988) and attempts to enunciate the role patriarchy plays in shaping the experiences of women. Thereafter, it critically explores the arguments by Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld (2005) which debunk Western theories of the public and private. They suggest that the public-private divide is not necessarily generalisable

to the complex multicultural and multi-ethnic landscape found in the South African context. This critique then leads into a discussion of intersectionality as a possible and perhaps more nuanced concept with which to analyse the issue of violence against women – it recognises the fact that not all women experience domestic violence in the same way, especially given the variation in culture, class, generation, and race that shape how people identify themselves. Every woman's experience is shaped by her context and individual social standing. In the last part of the chapter, the discussion turns to an interrogation of why, given the cross-cutting identities, class positions and races of women who experience domestic violence, that most women remain with their abusive partners.

To turn first to a definition of 'domestic violence' – a useful starting point is with the link between dignity and bodily integrity which is so closely tied to the idea of human rights. As Rakoczy writes, 'the emphasis on equality and dignity on any human being, irrespective of gender "is a strong foundation from which to condemn domestic violence"' (Rakoczy, 2004:34). The DVA defines domestic violence as the:

Physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, psychological and economic abuse of an individual. The definition also extends to the intimidation, harassment, stalking, damage of property, and entry into the victim's residence without permission in the case of them living apart. In addition, the act states that any other controlling or abusive behaviour or "conduct [that] harms, or may cause imminent harm to, the safety, health or, wellbeing of the compliant¹" is also regarded as domestic violence (DVA, 1998:2).

Lisa Vetten, one of South Africa's foremost researchers on gender based violence, shows that the act "is applicable to a range of familial and domestic relationships and covers both heterosexual and same sex relationships" (Vetten, 2005:4). Domestic violence is about intimate family violence – it is abuse of women, children and men. However, generally speaking, when thinking about domestic or gender based violence, violence against women comes to mind. We know that men, too, suffer from domestic abuse, however, "the focus on women is justified by overwhelming evidence that the majority of gender violence cases consist of violence against women" (Gender Links and MRC, 2010:2). Despite this evidence, however, there is an overwhelming reluctance for any arm of the state to intervene in

¹ Compliant refers to "[a]ny person who is or has been in a domestic relationship with a respondent and who is or has been subjected or allegedly subjected to an act of domestic violence, including any child in the care of the compliant" (Domestic Violence Act, 1998:1).

domestic affairs in most states across the globe, not only in democratic, liberal societies. South Africa is no exception. However, the fact that in many countries, domestic violence has become a public issue, whether of public safety or of public health, and states have begun to concern themselves with the welfare and well-being of intra-family relationships, means that the reluctance to interfere in the private affairs of family life is changing. Thus, the notion of the “duty to protect” which is the charge of the police force no longer legitimately stops at the front door of the home. Yet the notion of ‘privacy’ remains very powerful, and public policy is not always adhered to by those authorities that have the duty to protect. Instead, there remains a strong impulse for authorities to continue to adhere to the notion of privacy and to protect the consequence of the power and the authority of the head of the household from public scrutiny or sanction. It is only as a result of the struggle of the feminist movement for recognition of these consequences that public policy has been forced to accept responsibility to protect families from intimate violence.

The theories and dichotomies surrounding the notion of the private and public sphere have been pivotal in this research project. It is the dichotomy that makes for the distinction between the personal and the political. It has enabled the separation of the personal and the private from public scrutiny (Bock, 1991). John Locke (1689) in the 17th century argued for one kind of power in the household and another kind of power in civil society. Locke’s perspective suggested the dichotomy between the private and public realms that assumes that women have some power or even dominance in the private (the household), while men are “person representatives” in the public (Butler, 1991). The reason for this is due to the ‘natural’ and cultural attributes that have been assigned to men and women. Feminists challenge this assumption by stating that women do not have power nor do they dominate in the private, precisely because they are still submissive and subordinate to men, even if they are citizens with equal rights. This can be seen through their domestication and the role women take on as wives, mothers and daughters.

The work of Carol Pateman in *The Sexual Contract* (1988) suggests that the Social Contract and Social Contract Theorists fundamentally focus on men’s relationship to women despite not according much space to a discussion of women in their texts. The “original pact” as referred to by Hobbes (1651) is, argues Pateman, an agreement made by men to dominate and control women. This pact was made by a literal or metaphorical brotherhood that aimed to overthrow the rule of the father and replace it with the shared domination of the fraternity

over women. Thus, women were first ruled by “classical patriarchy” (the historical fact of male power and authority) that morphed into what can be called “modern patriarchy” (the contractual form where the neutral ‘individual’ refers to a man). Hobbes (1651) argues that a contract takes place wherein people come together with the intention of protecting society; it is in this moment that civil society and indeed, the state, is formed. He does not, however, explain why a woman agrees to enter into subordination. Locke (1689) in agreement with Hobbes (1651) on some issues offers a slightly different interpretation. He suggests that in nature, there are little commonwealths that precede the state and therefore agree on who should rule. Civil society thus precedes the state – unlike in Hobbes, where the state and civil society, and thus the social contract, form simultaneously. For Locke, men and women share power in the household; but when it comes to who should represent in the commonwealth, he argues that men are by nature fitter to rule – thus the person representative of the family should be a man.

Pateman (1988) showed that when a woman married a man she became his ‘property’. Not only did the husband have access to her property, but also to her body and he had power and authority over her. She goes on to explain that “capitalism and class have been constructed as modern patriarchal categories [and] a wife does not contract out her labour power to her husband. She is not paid a wage ... because her husband has command over the use of her labour by virtue of the fact that he is a man” (1988:135). Pateman (2013:1) argues that women are viewed as property which leads to their subordination. She is “concerned with the consequences of voluntary entry into contracts about property in the person. It is not about unequal conditions of entry into contracts or exploitation, significant though these problems are (Pateman, 2013:1). Pateman (1988:139) concludes that “the terms of the sexual contract ensure that all men... form an aristocracy of labour”.

While the origins of the public/private dichotomy shaped perceptions, feminists provided the problems that this gave rise to. Kelly (2003) argues in different vein from Pateman, that the notion of privacy is a problematic concept. For Kelly, the debate about domestic violence until late in the 20th century was that it was as a ‘private’ matter and therefore authorities should not get involved. Changes in the recognition transformed matters. Kelly writes:

[T]he criminalisation of domestic violence transforms what authorities might have previously dismissed as a husband’s prerogative into a problem warranting intervention

and even sanctions. On the other hand, very low reporting levels, police and judicial indifference, and a pattern of blaming the victim all suggest that many people, including some victims, continue to see domestic violence as a private matter that should not be subject to public scrutiny or intervention (Kelly, 2003:2).

In the South African context, Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld (2005) offer a pertinent perspective of the public versus private debate. They acknowledge that the early western feminist movement was successful ‘in revealing what went on behind closed doors as they politicised the public/private sphere and displayed how patriarchy confined women to the private sphere as well as restricted their representation in the public’ (Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld, 2005:5). However, Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld (2005:5) suggest that the public and private divide do not work in quite the same way in South Africa. Rather, they “debunk the myth that domestic violence primarily occurs in the privacy of the home and that abuse is rarely witnessed” (Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld, 2005:4). Instead they suggest that the split between the public and private sphere is not always applicable to the lives and lifestyles of people in all cultures. They argue that the notion of a split is often “unable to incorporate contextual and historical social relations other than gender (such as race, class, ethnicity, sexuality) that mark particular societies” (Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld, 2005:5). It fails to look at and analyse the intersectionality of various factors that contribute to abuse and to the positions the abused find themselves in.

Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld (2005:7) argue that domestic violence in South Africa is not hidden, even though it may occur in ‘the private’, as people are often aware of the violence taking place or witness it first-hand. They offer three reasons for their claim; first, due to the socio-economic circumstances that face the majority of the population, the notion of the private and closed doors does not exist in the same way as it does in the Western or ‘developed’ worlds. More often than not, South Africans are faced with multiple individuals (parents, siblings and extended family members) living under one roof “that either has no doors or is literally just one room due to dire economic straits and chronic housing shortages” (Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld, 2005:7). They go on to suggest, that “often shacks or houses are so close to each other or so poorly built, that neighbours are aware of the intimate dealings of families living next door, and thus are cognisant of domestic violence when it occurs” (Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld, 2005:7). Lastly, they suggest that a proportion of violence against women takes place in public spaces. They suggest that it is for these reasons

that one must understand that “community boundaries are far more permeable and fluid because in South Africa, for many women, the doors really are not ‘closed’” (Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld, 2005:7).

Within a South African context, Baillie and Peterson separately suggest that domestic violence is entrenched in a legacy of institutionalised violence from the apartheid period (Baillie, 2008 and Petersen, 2010). Petersen (2010:1) further adds that “women and children live in constant fear of being assaulted or raped”. This fear is a lived experience for many women and its proof can be seen in the 2012 study for the Medical Research Council which depicted that in South Africa “a woman died every 6 hours at the hands of her husband or boyfriend” (Abrahams et al., 2012:3), an extreme consequence of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is an issue that transcends race, class, gender, culture, religion and other social categories and despite the DVA it is a mammoth problem that has not been adequately dealt with. “Intimate partner violence is ... the leading cause of death of women homicide victims with 56% of female homicides being committed by an intimate partner [these statistics are more than double the rate in the United States (Logan et al., 2011)]. Furthermore our “intimate femicide rate is most likely an under-estimate because in over 20% of murders no perpetrator was identified” (Abrahams et al., 2012:3). Domestic violence is a global phenomenon that needs immediate and drastic intervention. The gross statistics of violence against women depicts that gender based violence is not only a South African problem but an international one. In 2016 the World Health Organisation’s statistics on violence against women show that “35% of women worldwide have experienced either intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime” (WHO, 2016:1). It should be noted that this statistic could be underrated as many women and cases of gender based violence go unreported or undocumented.

When discussing intimate partner violence in the United States, Del Martin discusses the historical roots and depicts it as a complex issue. Martin (1976: XIV) suggests that domestic violence involves much more than the violent act itself. She argues that when discussing wife beating ‘one needs to look towards the historical attitudes towards women’, “the institution of marriage, the economy, the intricacies, of criminal and civil law, and the delivery system of social service agencies” (Martin, 1976:XIV). She believes that attitudes towards women are deeply embedded within patriarchy. And often, patriarchal societies shape the social

meanings and understandings of the experiences of women. For Martin, the marriage contract “reflects the male-dominant bias of our culture” and thus subordinates women (Martin, 1976, 36).

Kelly (2003) suggests that the marriage contract and its restrictions are justified by the state as its main aim is to preserve the notion of the traditional family structure which is essentially the ‘commonwealth’ that Locke (1689) refers to. Thus, the feminist critique of the Social Contract is the fact that there is no rational explanation that can justify the exclusion of women from the public sphere and the enjoyment of civil rights. There is no attention given to the problems that arise when women are excluded from the original contract. The contract is a means of upholding patriarchy. Pateman’s *Sexual Contract* is important as her arguments apply not only to Western societies, but to all societies, including Muslim ones. One could compare Locke’s (1689) version of joint responsibility and women’s ability to negotiate their contracts in the family with some of the flexibility to be found in Muslim marriage contracts. For Locke (1689), the point of the contract, was that women were acknowledged as persons in the private, (in the home), but not as person representatives in the public realm as that role was reserved for men.

Feminist arguments have moved beyond a focus on the notion that ‘patriarchy’ is the decisive instrument of oppression and subordination to show that the issue is more complex. Other factors constitute gender power that affect and shape the experiences of women. The intersection of race, class, culture, generation are as important as patriarchy. Thus, experiences of women of different races, socio-economic status, religion, and culture are different. It is for this reason that the concept of intersectionality provides perhaps a most useful analytical tool when understanding the experiences of women and domestic violence.

It is Kimberle Crenshaw’s (1989) path-breaking conceptualisation of intersectionality that has been the inspiration for the anthology *Domestic Violence at the Margins: Readings on Race, Class, Gender, and Culture* with contributions from various authors (Sokoloff and Pratt, 2005). The notion of intersectionality alerts us to the understanding that domestic violence cross-cuts gender, race, class and other social categories. Thus, Sokoloff and Pratt (2005) suggest that the theorisation of domestic violence cannot take place on the basis of gender alone. It is for this reason that one needs to acknowledge and examine the intersections of race, religion, sexuality, immigration, cultural background, and class and how

these factors affect and shape the experiences of violence against women. Not all women experience domestic violence in the same manner and their differences play a pivotal role in understanding how victims of domestic violence experience domestic violence, how they are treated by others and whether they are able to escape their environments or not (Sokoloff and Pratt, 2005:25). Keeping intersectionality in mind what is interesting in this discussion are the perceptions that women have of battering husbands:

[A]s angry, resentful, suspicious, moody, and tense. Though they may be tarrying, they often have about them an aura of helplessness, fear, inadequacy, and insecurity. The battering husband is likely to be a “loser” in some basic way. He is probably angry with himself and frustrated by his life. He may put up a good front in public, but in the privacy and intimacy of his home he may not be able to hide, either from himself or his wife, his feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem (Martin, 1976:45).

Thus, men in these perspectives abuse due to frustration and their perceived failure to accord with societal expectations. The MRC suggests that:

[P]overty and social inequity are key drivers of violence. Inequality in access to wealth and opportunity results in feelings of low self-esteem, which are channelled into anger and frustration. Violence is often used to gain the sought after respect and power, whether through violent robbery, rape, severe punishment of children or violence against partners (MRC 2009:1).

Why do women remain with abusive partners? Petersen (2010:1) suggests that for women “fragmented [in the] coloured community” in South Africa, it is difficult for them to visualise a different future as they are so deeply entrenched in a “vicious cycle of poverty, unprecedented levels of violence and substance abuse”. Thus, for women to leave their partners is a difficult task. Martin (1976:77) as well as Barnett et al (2004:301) agree on two reasons as to why women remain with their abusive partners when discussing domestic violence in the Western world. The first reason may be because of fear. The second and perhaps more understandable reason is that abused women do not hate their partners but wish for the violence to stop. In order for women to leave, they have to believe and understand that their partners are not going to change and the violence will not stop. Michele Bograd in Sokoloff and Pratt (2005) argues that:

People of colour, the poor, and lesbians and gays are marked by frequent disruptive intrusions by the state. Given the fact that women from these marginalised groups

may face violence in their home, discrimination in the public domain, and brutality and insensitivity at the hands of law enforcement and other helping agencies, how can service providers address these women's multiple oppressions? (Bograd, 2005:25)

When trying to understand why Muslim women stay with their abusive partners, it is important to understand the difference between Islamic faith and Islamic culture. Faith is associated with instructions prescribed in the Qur'an. Whereas, culture refers to those practices, social behaviour, ideas and beliefs and customs of Muslim society derived from their understanding of the Qur'an. In their 2003 article Douki et al. discuss violence against women in Arab and Islamic countries. They argue that in Muslim households and communities' women are often blamed for the violence incurred. As a result, they feel guilty and responsible for the violence. They feel that they have failed in understanding the needs and pressures on their husbands. Abugideiri (2010:2) argues that women often wonder if God is punishing them for a sin committed or if their situation is a test from Him. Muslim women who find themselves in such situations struggle to understand how God might view their desire for a divorce – thus divorce in Muslim communities is often seen as taboo and is frowned upon. There is a “shame associated with divorced women or women who have reported their husbands to the police” (Abugideiri, 2010:2). Lastly, women “may be reluctant to turn to shelters due to misconceptions that their children will be taken away from them, that shelters will report undocumented persons, or that the negative perception of Muslims will be perpetuated” (Abugideiri, 2010:2).

Thus, the reasons why women remain silent and in their abusive relationships can be tied to their religion and belief in what God would think of them. But this is tied too, to the social and cultural conditions of belonging to a Muslim community and thus the social norms and values of that community. One further aspect may be what kind of impression non-Muslims would have of Muslims and Islam. It could be argued that women in these situations might put these religious, cultural and community factors before their own needs and interests, in particular their own safety. The social pressures deriving from the expectations of women and the fact that women should always put themselves last in any given situation need to be foregrounded.

In conclusion, in attempting to explain the nature of gender based violence and violence against women in particular, we need to understand how the intersection of gender, class,

culture, disability, age, forms of violence and race shape meanings and thus whether there might be avenues for escape. While, the literature addressed here has raised many pertinent issues, two in particular appear not to have been addressed in the literature. First, the notion of marital rape remains under-researched. Secondly, and most importantly the literature does not speak to how the perceptions and understanding of domestic violence determines how women deal with the problem. This is the case both for the South African literature and the broader international literature. This research report addressed this gap in the literature by investigating and commenting on the views of the perceptions of domestic violence.

Understanding the importance of the public and private as discussed by Kelly (2003) and Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld (2005) provided a useful analytical and conceptualisation for an understanding of how this dichotomy operates in South Africa. Whilst the public/private distinction as discussed by Kelly (2003) may not work in townships due to low walls, shacks built next to each other and many family members living under one roof, it could be applied to more middle class areas like Mayfair or even Houghton, where the privacy of high walls protects the family from public scrutiny. So the distinction as made by Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld (2005) should be used contextually depending on the area one is looking at.

However, whilst there is the physical aspect to housing in areas like townships, Mayfair and Houghton, people may suspect or know about incidences of domestic violence. So in essence what is and should be a public issue is constructed as a 'private matter' and people do not get involved.

Chapter 3: Feminist Theory, Discourse Analysis, Methodology and Research Methods

The aim of this chapter is to locate the study undertaken for this research report methodologically within the fields of feminist theory and discourse analysis. Because it is the perceptions of people within a particular community, broadly understood as being part of a specific culture and religion, that we are concerned to understand, the methods to the research conducted were qualitative, based upon a feminist theoretical and empirical approach. In this chapter I begin with a discussion of feminist knowledge production and feminist methodology. Thereafter, I discuss the methods of research used to conduct this research, while reflecting on the limitations as well as my own positioning and situatedness. I then go on to raise the ethical issues that arose during this journey. Lastly, I discuss my primary theoretical framework and how I conducted my research. My theoretical framework is broadly based on feminist theories. Conceptually, I discuss how the notions of power, discourse and hegemony have assisted in my analysis. But first, I address the reason for choosing a qualitative analysis.

In undertaking research on perceptions of domestic violence, the methodology best suited to answer the research topic and research questions is critical. Quantitative research largely produces numeric data that attempt to establish social facts, their connections and trends in society. With this approach statistical generalisations may be made. Qualitative and quantitative methods can be used in single study, depending on the focus of the empirical research (Giddens: 2006). In this study of the perceptions of select Muslims of domestic violence in their own community, statistical variables are beyond the scope of a research report. Rather, the method most suited to the question, was to undertake interviews and focus groups, with an interview schedule that directed participants to discuss their understanding of domestic violence, and how it related to Islamic values and beliefs. Both the analysis of interviews and focus groups allowed for the surfacing and intersection of discursive constructions of religious and gender power. A discourse analysis of the interviews enabled the researcher to look for themes and patterns emerging from the gender and generational differences of the participants. In addition, it was useful, in seeing various similarities in situations which revealed the essence of the subject of the research.

3.1.1. Feminist Methodology:

This research report began with the objective of locating it within feminist knowledge production. The notion of feminist knowledge production influences not only the approaches to collecting and bringing material together, but also to the lens through which one analyses that material. Feminist knowledge production aims to disrupt dominant, hetero-normative and patriarchal discourses. As Elizabeth Grosz (1994:4) argues the dominant systems of producing knowledge are derived from a ‘western’ epistemological form of reasoning based on bifurcations that rank dichotomies such as ‘mind and body, thought and extension, reason and passion, psychology and biology’ and subordinating one to the other in a hierarchy. This form of knowledge production supports a patriarchal stance that deems ‘feminine’ ways of knowing valueless. Thus, feminist knowledge producers ought to use an alternative intellectual framework to create discourses that speak to women’s experience within a gendered framework. Feminist knowledge production is an attempt to challenge and provide alternative theoretical and conceptual methodologies to mainstream research.

Jane Flax (1987:626) argues that “insofar as women have been part of all societies, our thinking cannot be free from cultural-bound modes of self-understanding”. These modes of understanding are underpinned by patriarchal values wherein ‘man’ is viewed as the norm and ‘woman’ is viewed as the deviant. Therefore, feminist theory needs to analyse how one thinks of, or does not think of, or avoids thinking of gender (Flax, 1987:627). For Flax it is important to recognise the various discourses that exist and think about the oppressive frameworks in which knowledge has come to be produced. Thereafter, one should interrogate these frameworks from a feminist perspective.

There is no one type of feminist methodology, and neither Grosz nor Flax indicate what it would look like. However, Flax (1990:182) does indicate the purpose of feminist theorists:

- (1) To articulate feminists viewpoints of and within the social worlds in which we live,
- (2) to think about how we are affected by these worlds,
- (3) to think about how our thinking about them might itself be implicated in existing power/knowledge relationships, and
- (4) to think also about the ways in which these worlds ought and can be transformed.

Thus, the “expressions and consequences of relations of domination” need to be fully explored (Flax, 1990:182). Feminist methodology and theory was further developed by feminists of colour, who not only broke away from the hetero-normative, white male dominant point of view, but also challenged essentialist thinking among feminists. Thus, the feminist imaginary “begins from the premise that the nature of reality in western society is unequal and hierarchical” (Skeggs, 1994:77). It questions the idea that gender can be neutral, but views the world through a gender lens that suggests that women and men experience the world differently. Androcentrism (male-centeredness) provides the dominant mode of thinking and being in society. This viewpoint enables the researcher to critically engage with the topic from an alternative standpoint and lens, thus voicing the experiences of women.

3.1.2. Textual Analysis:

A text refers to anything that a researcher interprets and makes meaning of (McKee, 2013:1). Researchers use this methodological tool in an attempt to gather information about how individuals make sense of the world (McKee, 2013:1). Due to the existence of numerous cultures and languages, each culture has a different experience of reality (McKee, 2013:4-6). No single reality can be the only one or the only accurate reality. In addition, language is also important because each language has words that signify “different meanings and connotations” (McKee, 2013:4). In some instances when analysing a text that is in another language or from another culture, there are sometimes no equivalent terms in translation. Because of these limitations, meaning and messages tend to get lost in translation.

McKee (2003) suggests three ways in which individuals ‘judge’ realities and the manner in which people make sense of the world. He begins by explaining a realist approach to understanding a text, which argues that ‘my culture’ is correct as it describes reality and other cultures are wrong (McKee, 2003:9). A second approach, the structuralist approach, would argue that all cultures make sense of the world differently, but beneath the surface there is some commonality. Therefore, people are “not all that different; people across the world are basically the same” (McKee, 2003:9). Lastly, a post-structuralist approach argues that all cultures make sense of the world differently; however, it is impossible to say that one is right and the others are wrong ... people from different cultures experience reality differently ” (McKee, 2003:9). In this report, I have used a textual analysis to explore and analyse Verse 34, Chapter 4 from the Qur’an and the interview transcripts (texts), adopting a post-structural

approach. This enabled me to locate and understand the beliefs and ideas of my participants within their own cultural milieu. Thereafter, I attempt to give alternate ways of understanding the views which they brought up. Hartley (as cited in McKee, 2003:15) would describe this process as “the material reality [of texts] allows for the recovery and critical interrogation of discursive politics in an ‘empirical’ form”.

3.1.3. Methods:

A feminist perspective takes a standpoint position and focuses on the aims of achieving full gender equality. It thus, has a normative objective – in this case of surfacing discursive constructions and perceptions of domestic violence amongst select Muslims in Johannesburg and their views about what should be done about it. The qualitative approach is relevant for this study as the research seeks to explore and understand the gendered socio-political complexities with that community. The approach adopted an in-depth process of anonymous interviews and focus groups based on age and gender that provided a broader understanding of perceptions among individuals and groups (Pierce, 2008). The analysis adopted a discourse analysis in an attempt to bring to the surface the power dynamics in the perceptions of views on gender relations and the understanding of gender violence in that process.

The value of the qualitative approach adopted in this study is that it allows the researcher to “see the world through the subjects eyes” (Pierce: 2008), and enables, at different points, to shift the focus from the individual to the group and vice versa, thus offering an understanding of dominant powers that might be at play. In that sense, this approach is phenomenological, which places experience and subjectivity at the centre.

For this research I interviewed a number of members from Muslim community. The interview process began with interviews with a representative from the Jamiatu-ul-Ulama², members from Islamic Careline³, a Muslim member of the South African Police Services

² The *Jamiatul Ulama* (Council of Theologians), with its head office located in central Johannesburg. It is a self-appointed body of Muslim theologians, primarily belonging to the Deobian School. They profess to represent the interest of primarily Muslims in the Northern part of the country. They have created a body that aims to serve the Muslim community in South Africa. The *Jamiatul Ulama* are a highly respected body in South Africa and have a vast influence on the Muslim community. See also www.thejamiat.co.za

³ Islamic Careline “is a registered NPO (Non–Profit Organization) and maintains legitimate standards according to government regulations. The service is a project of the Jamiatul Ulama South Africa and is based in

(SAPS), Zubeida Dangor, the Director of NISAA – Institute for Womens Development⁴ and Na’eem Jeenah, an executive member of a Mosque in Johannesburg⁵. These individuals were purposefully chosen in order to give the perspectives of leading members in the Muslim community in Johannesburg. In addition, they were chosen in order to grasp a holistic understanding of ‘what is going on’. If support structures do exist, to what extent are they being recognised, if at all? Who is identified as available for help and why?

In addition to the above organisations, a large body of my research data was collected through anonymous interviews in the form of focus groups. The initial idea was to attach this research to a specific Mosque and speak to the mosque committee as well as individuals who attend the Mosque. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic the Imam of the Mosque was unable to find a way to integrate me into the Mosque. This was unfortunate as speaking to members of a Mosque would have meant that I might have had the opportunity to meet people of all races – that would have added an interesting dynamic of how people from different cultures yet one religion perceive and understand domestic violence. After this attempt failed, I approached Islamic Careline and the Jamiat. Both attempted to assist but the people whom they introduced me to were unavailable or did not know any participants who would have been willing to assist.

The attitude of some people to the research is instructive in terms of providing an insight into how gender based violence is viewed. For example, an individual who works at Islamic Careline reported that he had approached some of his friends to participate in this project but I was informed that “they made a big joke out of it”. Members of the Muslim Indian community declined my request to participate too. This led me to question why individuals would not take this topic seriously. Initially, I felt that they were disrespectful or ignorant to this problem, a lived experience for many Muslims and non-Muslims and did not deem the issue worthy enough to talk about. However, upon mentioning this to the women in the 35+ focus group, a respondent said to me ‘maybe they just don’t think it’s an issue anymore, which is interesting’.

Johannesburg”. They focus on providing professional psycho-social services in the Johannesburg from Islamic perspective. See also <http://www.jmtsa.co.za/services/counselling-services/>

⁴ “Nisaa is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation opposed to all forms of oppression, exploitation and violence against women”. ‘Their particular focus is on gender violence and the empowerment of women who have been abused by their partners’. See also <http://www.nisaa.org.za/>

⁵ Na’eem Jeenah a feminist activist is the executive director of the *Afro-Middle East Centre* and is a committee member of Masjid-UI-Islam; a Mosque in Brixton, Johannesburg.

I eventually received support from the Imam of the Mosque whom I had first approached. Through his contacts, I found that individuals were willing to assist but were unable to make the specified time of the focus group or cancelled at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances. After this I contacted people whom I knew to ask for assistance. I contacted a family friend who asked women from her Islamic class to be a part of my 35+ focus group. She also introduced me to a woman from the same Islamic class who formed part of the 19-35 focus group. This woman introduced me to her husband who formed part of the men aged 19-35 focus group. The one respondent of the women 19-35 focus group was introduced to me by a friend and lastly the other two participants of this focus group were acquaintances of mine due to last minute cancellations⁶. The rest of the participants for the men aged 19-35 focus group were introduced to me by another member of the women 19-35 focus group or were again acquaintances of mine due to last minute cancellations. It should be clarified that none was anyone I knew well. This meant I was able to retain some emotional distance from all members of the focus groups. Lastly, for the men aged 35+ focus group a snowball sample was drawn in from contacts in my own community.

As outlined above four focus groups were held with 4–6 individuals. The initial plan was to host focus groups with five people present, however, due to last minute cancellations or additions the focus group either decreased or increased by one member. To reiterate, the focus groups were held with women aged 19-35, women aged 35+, men aged 19-35 and men aged 35+. The only aspects that tied these interviewees together were the fact that they belonged to the specified age group and gender and the fact that they were all Muslim. The intergenerational and gendered approach gave me an insight into how Muslims with different strands of thoughts and beliefs perceive and understand domestic violence. In addition, it allowed me to compare the changing perceptions of domestic violence from generation to generation and between people who identify as male or female.

Thus, the interview and focus group were the primary methods of research and data collection. The sampling by gender and generation was purposive and my interviewees were gathered via a snowball process. It should be noted the snowball process was limited as it created an innate or inherent bias in the information that was extracted from the interviews. All of my interviewees with the exception of one individual were from the Muslim Indian

⁶ Last minute cancellations in this context refer to cancellations made on the day at least 1 hour before the focus group was scheduled to take place.

community in Johannesburg; one interviewee was a convert to the religion. In addition, the respondents belonged to a middle class socio-economic bracket.

This research used semi-structured interview schedules (which brought forth deep-rooted information that was relevant to the question itself). This method was chosen primarily because it provides an opportunity for the researcher to probe certain points that may be useful to the study and may have not been captured in the questions asked but were mentioned by the participant. In addition, in some cases it assisted in understanding the backgrounds, experiences and beliefs that had led the participants to their thoughts and ideas. Flax would argue that feminist theory “is dependent upon and reflects a certain set of social experiences” (Flax, 1987:628-633) and this is exactly what I had done in this research report. A tape recorder with the permission of the interviewees was used during the interview process to record the interview. The interviews were conducted in a seminar room at the University of the Witwatersrand and the women aged 35+ focus group was held at a participant’s home before their Islamic class. In this research report I have kept all my interviewees anonymous and they were thus more open in their opinions. In addition, due to the sensitive nature of the topic and of what was said, it was clear that complete anonymity was necessary to protect all the participants.

3.1.4. Positioning:

As a member of the Muslim Indian community it is ethically important to address my positioning insofar as the study is concerned. I am a Muslim, Indian, woman activist, from a privileged background, where I have been encouraged to be independent and free-thinking. I thus entered a realm where patriarchy, customs, religion, culture and traditions intersect and construct the lives of people in ways that were possibly different from my own. In this study I tried to reflect on my own set of biases and preconceived notions of what I believe to be true or how the world ought to be. Thus, when conducting my interviews and research I tried to be open-minded and allow the individual and groups to speak while I listened. My perspective as a feminist could have been problematic to non-feminists. But, I found that people spoke openly to me. In addition, being a Muslim meant that some of the nuances in the language used by Muslims were second-nature. I tried to critically self-reflect in this regard.

On the other hand, being a Muslim assisted as I was able to gain the trust of the interviewees and thus there was considerable openness. Consequently, their trust in me and our common ground shared in religion allowed a safe space for us to speak openly about our community, our ideas and criticisms of family life and perceptions of domestic violence.

3.1.5. Limitations:

A major risk that was raised in the proposal was that a Mosque would not allow me access to its congregants, and this did in fact occur. However, other mechanisms of identifying informants mitigated this problem. Both individual contacts and those of organisations targeted for interviews filled this gap. In this case the snowball technique of identifying participants was used.

3.1.6. Ethical Issues:

The topic is of a sensitive and controversial nature, so people who were interviewed were able to withdraw at any time. Anonymity was the default position unless the participant opted and requested that their identity be revealed. The engagement with the participants began by requesting that they read an information sheet and sign a consent form which outlined in detail what the research seeks to do and what is expected of them as participants in this study. This form indicated the interviews would be recorded and they could opt out of the research at any point if they chose. In addition, the participants were informed that their identity would be anonymous in order to ensure their privacy and dignity especially with information that might be too personal. Participant responses were treated with confidentiality. I refrained from bias or being judgemental towards participant responses and remained neutral in all encounters during the research work.

The interrogation of gender based violence was addressed in a way that enabled a discussion about its meaning and how it could be addressed through support groups both within families and in the greater community. The discussion was more about meaning than about the experience of individuals of gender violence. However, two participants spoke from their personal experience. Throughout, the research I constantly interacted with my supervisor Prof. Sheila Meintjes, such that I was able to receive the necessary guidance as well as skills to deal with the challenges encountered during the fieldwork.

3.2. Theoretical Framework:

This section of the chapter will discuss the theories that assisted and underpinned this research. The backbone of this research rested on theories surrounding power and discourse, and hegemony. It will look at how these notions and theories assisted in theorising the perceptions that select Muslims in Johannesburg had of domestic violence.

3.2.1. Power and Discourse

Power enables one to comprehend the process of empowerment and disempowerment. Marxist feminism suggests that capitalist class relationships are the cause of the oppression, exploitation and discrimination women face. Due to the fact that women are forced into domestic roles through the system of patriarchy and the notion of a family structure, men dominate positions of public and authoritative power and influence in the work place and in the public political sphere. Men are socialised to dominate in relation to their work environment, they then carry this socialisation into the home i.e. the private.

There is no definitive explanation for why men abuse. However, survivors have given various reasons for why they think their partners abuse them – from lack of success at work, to feelings of sexual inadequacy. Pumla Dineo Gqola, speaks of a rape culture, where men raped ‘because they could’ and that they felt rape ‘was a type of sex that they were entitled to’ (Gqola, 2015:2). Her study suggests that a rape culture is part of a collective socialisation, where ‘we...accept the ever-presence of rape most often by being invited to be vigilant’ (Gqola, 2015:3). For Gqola, patriarchal masculinities are at the heart of explaining the rape culture, and makes rape in a sense ‘permissible’. In this context, Raewyn Connell’s path-breaking work on masculinities and the ways in which gender power is constituted offer a useful starting point for discussion. Connell’s work in masculinity studies, has pointed to the hierarchy of masculinities in society. A key variable seems to be that of authority and power, and how it operates in intimate settings. This cross-cuts divisions of class and wealth. Thus, gender violence is not exclusive to any social or economic category.

Gqola boldly writes ‘Rape is a crime of power, and in patriarchal societies, all men can access patriarchal power’ (Gqola, 2015:11). Yet it is also a truism that all human beings have agency, so victims of rape, too, survive. Agency is a critical variable in understanding how

violence operates. In his work, Foucault (1972) creates a shift from the normative construction of power, towards a notion of power that surrounds the subject. Thus, his concern is in the way that power and authority is exercised within institutions and structures and how this power affects members of society. Foucault postulated that power can be exerted and felt at all levels among all members of society. And that discourse serves as a means to exert power as well. These ideas are important in helping us to understand the ways in which the discourse around domestic violence has been structured and how this discourse either empowers or disempowers the ordinary citizen.

Foucault defines discourse as “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972:215-237). According to Hall (1992) “a discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic” (Hall, 1992:201). By this Hall means that when statements are made by individuals, discourse makes it possible to conceptualise the topic in a certain manner, in doing so, this limits other possibilities in which the topic could be spoken about or understood. The language and words we choose to use also inform the process of comprehension and speech. Foucault believes there is a relationship between discourse and power and what one may or may not speak about. He would describe this as “power-knowledge” (Foucault, 1972:215-237).

The understanding of the ways in which power and authority operates and is understood was crucial to my research. For example my participants argued that Islamically, men and women are equal, yet the interpretation by N.J. Dawood (1956) of Verse 34, Chapter 4 in the Qur’an suggests that “men are [the] authority over women”. It can be argued that a different discourse “enters into and influences all social practices” (Hall, 1992:202). In addition, each participant had their own ideas about power which created a specific discourse in the conversation about perceptions of domestic violence. The notion of discourse has been instrumental in allowing me to be more aware of my social surroundings and the different realms I was entering. By this, I mean when I was conducting interviews, depending on my interviewee, I had to be mindful of what or was not suitable speech, so as to not offend my interviewees.

3.2.2. Hegemony

Hegemony for Antonio Gramsci referred to ideological domination, meaning “every culture contains particular world views, ideologies; some of these are common to the cultures within a society and are common to the cultures that comprise the dominant groups. We accept commonly held world views as truths” (Villanueva on Gramsci, 1993:140). For Gramsci, the notion of organic ideologies refer to “the commonly held conceptions of the world held by various cultures, a culture’s way of seeing and believing” (Villanueva on Gramsci, 1993:141). These cultural/societal beliefs are upheld by institutions such as religion, schools and the media. These institutions which are part of a dominant culture are enforced from the time individuals are young so that alternative ways of living and conceptualising a society are hard to envision. Gramsci also mentions strategic action which refers to the language we choose to speak and write with that allows us to maintain hegemony in society (Villanueva on Gramsci, 1993:141). Hegemony is so deeply embedded within cultures and societies that we fail to think of alternative methods of functioning and the ability to criticise our own conceptions.

The notion of hegemony was of particular importance to my research as it enabled me to locate the hegemonic ideas in the perceptions of domestic violence that select Muslims in Johannesburg have – thus in turn it suggested the broader community’s views of domestic violence. An example of this can be seen in the fact that all of my interviewees argued that men are the “protectors” of women and not in charge of them as some of the *Qur’anic* interpretations suggest. Hegemony has the capability to normalise certain beliefs in society. Discourse is fed by hegemony as it has the ability to create ‘a truth’ and as a result discourse occurs within a specific hegemonic structure.

In conclusion, in order to analyse the significance of the perceptions of domestic violence among different age and gender cohorts in the Muslim community, the most relevant methodologies will link textual and discourse analysis of the interviews with the concept of hegemony. The focus group and individual interviews offer the potential, through the lens of a feminist analysis of the way gender power is conceived by informants in discussion with one another, to surface deep structures of hegemonic belief. In the next chapter, we turn to the key text within Islam, to explore the major discourses about gender power relations.

Chapter 4: The Qur'an, Women and the Issue of Domestic Violence

Chapter 4, Verse 34 in the Qur'an reads:

ar-rijālu qawwāmūna 'alā n-nisā'i bi-mā faḍḍala llāhu ba'dahum 'alā ba'din wa-bi-mā 'anfaqu min 'amwālihim fa-ṣ-ṣāliḥātu qānitātun ḥāfiẓātun li-l-ghaybi bi-mā ḥafiẓa llāhu wa-llātī takhāfūna nushūzahunna fa- 'izūhunna wa-hjurūhunna fī l-maḍājī 'i wa-dribūhunna fa- 'in 'aṭa 'nakum fa-lā tabghū 'alayhinna sabīlan 'inna llāha kāna 'aliyyan kabīran (the highlighted words are controversial and debatable).

Men are *qawwamun* (authority) over women, because God has preferred some over others and because they spend of their wealth. Righteous women are obedient and guard in [their husband's] absence what God would have them guard. Concerning from those women whom you fear *nushuz* (disobedience/rebellion), admonish them, and/or abandon them bed, and/or *wa-dribuhunna* (hit them). If they obey you, do not seek means against them. God is most High, Great (N.J.Dawood, 1956)⁷.

There has been extensive research on domestic violence in South Africa; however, there is little research on domestic violence in Muslim communities in South Africa. This chapter begins with a discussion of the various interpretations of Chapter 4 Verse 34. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss domestic violence within an Islamic context. First, a background to the Qur'an and its interpretation will be discussed in order to situate the essence of violence in Islam. We then discuss the different ways of thinking about this verse and the perceptions of select Muslims in Johannesburg. And lastly, the chapter turns to a more global perspective in discussing domestic violence in Muslim communities. The approach adopted in this chapter is a textual analysis of the verse, and domestic violence, and how both are understood and interpreted by my informants, select Muslims in Johannesburg.

The Qur'an is known and accepted as the word of God. Muslims believe that it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad over a span of 23 years and was compiled into a book only after his death (Jeenah, 2001:43-44). As issues and events took place during the Prophet's lifetime, the Prophet received revelations as a form of communication and guidance between God and His messenger. The Prophet was "expected not only to interpret the scripture but, more importantly, to engage his community in making it a lived experience" (Jeenah,

⁷ Translation for N.J. Dawood can be found at:

1. Dawood, N.J. (2004) *The Koran* Penguin Classics first written in 1956
2. <http://al-quran.info/#home> (<http://al-quran.info/4/34/N6>)

2001:43). Therefore, it can be argued that the Qur'an is a compilation of commands and everyday advice on how Muslims should live their lives and interact with all human beings. Furthermore, because of the existence of many interpretations of the Qur'an, Muslims are encouraged to use the life of the Prophet Muhammad as a supplement to the Qur'an.

The Qur'an was revealed and written in Arabic, a language in which "everything is either masculine or feminine" (Jeenah, 2001:66) and words can have multiple meanings. As Ayesha Chaudhry (2014:224) argues, one needs to approach the Qur'an "as a performative text". By this Chaudhry (2014) means the Qur'an allows for and is open to multiple interpretations and meanings depending on the interactions of Muslims from various communities and at different times. In addition, Muslim feminist scholars such as Fatima Mernissi (1987), Leila Ahmed (1992) and Aamina Wadud (1999) argue that interpretations of the Qur'an are part of a long-standing tradition that has been written almost entirely by men. Thus, 'patriarchal views' of the Qur'an are a result of the patriarchal interpretations of it as opposed to the Qur'an or religion itself (Wadud, 1999: xv). Therefore, 'the meanings and understandings of these interpretations are derived from various interactions within different Muslim communities' (Chaudhry, 2014:224) and inform the reader about the interpreter and which context he/she is interpreting from.

There is no single interpretation of the Qur'an and when understanding domestic violence within an Islamic perspective, it is important to understand the various discourses surrounding this sacred text. One of the most controversial and debatable verse in the Qur'an is Chapter 4, Verse 34 which has more than one translation, and as can be seen the Arabic words have different translations. This chapter will mention five interpretations in order to show the differences and where the controversy lies. This will be followed by a discussion on the interpretations of the verse. Finally, the issue of the Qur'an will be discussed⁸. The intention of this discussion is to highlight the discursive constructions and perceptions of domestic violence amongst select Muslims in Johannesburg. Therefore, in this context, religion will not be discussed as a doctrine but rather a discourse and the religious interpretations as discursive in order to enable an analysis of the various interpretations and views of the interviewees. The difference is that a discourse allows a space for debate on an

⁸ It should be noted it is not the purpose of this research report to establish a 'correct' interpretation nor religious prescription with respect to the treatment of women, as this is beyond its scope.

issue whereas a doctrine is a set of beliefs that are taught and generally accepted as is. The select interpretations are as follows:

- **Marmaduke Pickthall (1922)**⁹

“Men **are in charge of women**, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for their support of women). So good women are the obedient, **guarding in secret that which Allah** hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and **scourge them**. Then, if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High Exalted, Great” (Q4:34).

- **Yusuf Ali (1946)**¹⁰

“Men are the **protectors and maintainers of women**, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and **guard in (the husband's) absence** what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) **beat them (lightly)**; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all)” (Q4:34).

- **N.J. Dawood (2004 first written in 1956)**

“Men are *qawwamun* (**authority**) over women, because God has preferred some over others and because they spend of their wealth. **Righteous women are obedient and guard in [their husband's] absence** what God would have them guard. Concerning from those women whom you fear *nushuz* (disobedience/rebellion), admonish them, and/or abandon them bed,

⁹ Translation for M.Pickthall can be found at:

1. <http://www.khayma.com/librarians/call2islaam/quran/pickthall/>
(<http://www.khayma.com/librarians/call2islaam/quran/pickthall/surah4.html>)
2. <http://al-quran.info/#home> (<http://al-quran.info/4/34/Ny>)
3. <http://www.altafsir.com/>
(<http://www.altafsir.com/ViewTranslations.asp?Display=yes&SoraNo=4&Ayah=34&toAyah=34&Language=2&LanguageID=2&TranslationBook=3>)
4. <http://www.islam101.com/quran/QTP/index.htm>
(<http://www.islam101.com/quran/QTP/QTP004.htm>)
5. <http://humanities.wisc.edu/assets/misc/veilingsurahsquran.pdf>
6. http://www.studyquran.org/resources/Quran_Reformist_Translation.pdf p.p. 17
7. <http://corpus.quran.com/> (<http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=4&verse=34>)
8. <http://www.quranonline.net/> (<http://www.quranonline.net/html/trans/options/cmpr/4.html>)

¹⁰ Translation for Y.Ali can be found at:

1. <http://www.islam101.com/quran/QTP/index.htm>
(<http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/QURAN/4.htm>)
2. <http://al-quran.info/#home> (<http://al-quran.info/4/34/Nb>)
3. <http://www.altafsir.com/>
(<http://www.altafsir.com/ViewTranslations.asp?Display=yes&SoraNo=4&Ayah=34&toAyah=34&Language=2&LanguageID=2&TranslationBook=4>)
4. http://www.studyquran.org/resources/Quran_Reformist_Translation.pdf p.p. 17
5. <http://corpus.quran.com/> (<http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=4&verse=34>)
6. <http://www.quranonline.net/> (<http://www.quranonline.net/html/trans/options/cmpr/4.html>)

and/or *wa-dribuhunna* (**hit them**). If they obey you, do not seek means against them. God is most High, Great” (Q4:34).

- **Syyid Qutb (1951-1965:94)**

“Men **shall take full care of women** with the bounties with which God has favoured some of them more abundantly than others, and with what they may spend of their own wealth. **The righteous women are devout, guarding the intimacy** which God has ordained to be guarded. As for those women from whom you have reason to fear rebellion, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; **then beat them**. Then, if they pay you heed, do not seek any pretext to harm them. God is indeed Most High, Great” (Q4:34).

- **Muhammad Asad’s (2003:126-127) (first published in 1980)**

“Men **shall take full care of women** with the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter, and with what they may spend out of their possessions. And **the righteous women are the truly devout ones, who guard the intimacy** which God has [ordained to be] guarded. And as for those women whose ill-will you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; **then beat them**; and if thereupon they pay you heed, do not seek to harm them. Behold, God is indeed most high, great!” (Q4:34).

The above translations provide clear evidence of how conflicting traditions and opinions arise. They also give rise to differing interpretations. These interpretations demonstrate quite different meanings. They also indicate the difference between kinds of authority and kinds of protection. In practice, these differing discourses imply the appreciation of different kinds of power. Pre-modern scholars shared “idealised cosmologies” and “visions of the universe as it would exist if all humans submitted entirely to God’s laws” (Chaudhry, 2014:196). Chaudhry (2014) suggests that it can be argued that these pre-modern interpretations and ‘idealised cosmologies’ have a patriarchal element that created a social hierarchy which placed men above women. Idealised cosmologies, according to Chaudhry (2014:11) refer to a utopian representation of the world as God intended it to be. It thus understood the role of husband to be the ‘mediator’ between his wife and God and therefore he is morally and materially responsible for her (Chaudhry, 2014). Furthermore, her obedience to her husband indicated her submission to God.

Chaudhry (2014) further argues that until the 20th century, pre-modern Muslim scholars believed and advocated that a husband disciplining his ‘rebellious’ wife was a necessity. This can be seen in every translation where the use of the words “hit them” “scourge them” or “beat them” have been used. It can be further argued that ‘under certain circumstances’ men

have the license to physically discipline their wives. However, under what circumstances is physical violence or punishing one's wife justifiable? The interpreters never reached a consensus as to what is regarded as 'rebellious behaviour'. With later translations this changed and can be seen from the use of the words "and/or", "first" and "then". There is a shift from one set of actions of which 'beating'/violence is part of a model in which domestic violence is used as a means of domestic authority. This then shifts to options one can take before resorting to physical violence as a final sequence in an escalating relationship. It is the way in which the punishment is sequenced and weighted that matters.

The interpretations and discourses point to significant differences available for the justification or condemnation of domestic violence. So how do parts of Islamic tradition become employed in the discourse about domestic violence, either justifying for or against it? Chaudhry (2014:222) argues that:

[P]re-colonial scholars justified the moral and disciplinary oversight of husbands over wives and sanctioned husbands to use physical discipline when necessary. In the post-colonial period, an egalitarian idealised cosmology has enabled Muslim scholars to voice ethical objections to legal and interpretive traditions that have ensconced the disciplinary rights of husbands over wives.

It can be argued that the shift in interpretations and understandings of the verse is a result of an egalitarian tradition that has enabled and opened new understandings to the Qur'an – thus challenging hetero-normative conceptions of gender and gender roles. In addition to the Qur'an, the precedent of the Prophet in the form of the *Sunnah* constitutes a secondary source of Islamic law. This is represented in the form of the *Hadeeth* tradition which can be deployed as another source of religious instruction and information in respect of domestic violence.

Whilst on the surface this verse seems to 'justify' and condone 'reprimanding' one's wife it is important to create a discourse around it. In my research and interviews, I therefore sought to open a discussion on this verse to access the understandings, interpretations and views of my informants. In the discussions it became clear that they had varying views as well. The N.J. Dawood interpretation was used in all of the interviews and focus groups as Chaudhry (2014) uses this definition in her book. In addition, Dawood's definition of *qawwamun* differed from the other interpreter's definitions which allowed for the

interpretation to be explicitly contested. And I had hoped my interviewees would question the definition of *qawwamun* thus questioning whether men have authority over women or not.

Upon reciting this translation to Na'eem Jeenah (11 May 2015), a feminist activist, his response was that 'it was a bad interpretation of the verse' and there are many interpretations for the words used in this verse. Jeenah (11 May 2015) offered a different, but well-articulated interpretation, based on understanding the significance of history, time and place. He premised the importance of hermeneutics and context of any given text. He argued that *qawwamun* most commonly means "providing for" as opposed to "being in authority, superior to or in charge of". Jeenah (11 May 2015) further explained the manner in which changes crept in and the debates that arouse about how to interpret what was written. He argues that this verse was revealed to a particular community and its applicability to other contexts needs interpretation. It describes a tribal society wherein women were not required to provide for themselves or their families and this role was the duty of their associated men – which could be a father, brother, husband or son. However, this does not mean that women were and are not allowed to work.

Thereafter, he discussed the question and meaning of 'women who are guilty of rebellion'. Jeenah (11 May 2015) argued that the translation and interpretation of [their husband's] is actually "an imposition of the verse [as] it doesn't occur in the Arabic of the verse". He continued by suggesting that some interpretations say "those women who are disobedient to their husbands", again this is not part of the Arabic verse. Jeenah (11 May 2015) went on to argue that the last part of the verse is the most difficult part as it discusses women who are guilty of rebellion and the options that one should take:

[O]ne of the interpretations is that it's not actually talking about individual husbands and wives; [but rather because] men are the *qawwamun* of women. ... So the verse is talking in the collective sense about men and women and so it shouldn't suddenly switch in the last part of it to talk about a husband and his wife [only] (Jeenah, Interview, 11 May 2015).

Lastly, he expanded on the notion of 'beating' – a soft tap. The interpretation he shows has been used to justify real abuse. He said:

There's a whole discourse about what's the proper way of beating her. That the beating of the wife should not be excessive it should be a light tap with a hanky or *miswaak*. And this is the problematic part; the use of this verse to justify the beating of women from using a handkerchief to killing her basically. I don't think anyone would justify killing based on this particular verse but that's often where it ends up. So the beating is justified on the basis that she's disobedient and that when beating becomes excessive it does end up in death. And I think that's a very problematic way in which the verse is used and not by ordinary people but also by many Muslim scholars who use it to argue that it is legitimate (Jeenah, Interview, 11 May 2015).

His arguments regarding the various interpretations of the verse were the most succinct and well-constructed account of the differing interpretations. Thus, his arguments could also be used as an alternate interpretation and understanding to the verse. In the interviews and focus groups conducted with men and women, many of these arguments were enunciated. The analysis which follows draws on the views of the women in the 35+ focus group, the women in the 19-35 focus group, the men in the 19-35 focus group, the men in the 35+ focus group and a representative from the Jamiat. The women in the 35+ focus group suggested the verse pertains to men being the "protectors" of women and not really the authority over them (Focus group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015). The women and men in the 19-35 focus groups (17 May and 23 May) focussed their answer on the need to understand the context of the verse. For them, the verse taken out of context "can seem very pro [punishing you wife]" (Focus group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015). Their shared views resemble the earlier comments made by Jeenah (2001:48), who argued for the need to understand the historical context before interpretation. A woman participant said:

[T]here's a lot more context required; when was it revealed? At what point in the Prophet's life, and what was his living interpretation of it because ... he was the living example of the Qur'an and he never raised his hands to any of his wives (Focus group, Women 19-35, 17 May).

A similar response was given by the men in the 19-35 focus group (23 May 2015). One participant said that:

[E]very *tafsir* and every interpretation that has come along is only based on the person interpreting it. So to an extent they can try and be as objective as they can in trying to explain it but at the same time we have to acknowledge that there's going to be some slither if not a whole 50% of subjectivity in that. Also ... the situation of when the verse was revealed also tells us a lot about the meaning of the verse and in all the *tafsirs* that

I've read through, there's not many who first go into the background and the setting before giving an interpretation of a verse, they just go straight into what they think the verses mean (Focus group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

As can be seen both the women 19-35 (17 May 2015) and men 19-35 (23 May 2015) focus groups argued that interpretations tell the reader more about the interpreter than about the text itself. These arguments mimic those made by Chaudhry (2014:224) who suggests that "readers and their expectations determine the meaning of any given piece of *Qur'anic* text". In addition to context, the participants from all of the focus groups used Prophet Muhammad's life and the person he was to argue against using this verse as advocating for violence against women. In all of the focus groups the participants argued that 'the Prophet who was the greatest human being never hit or abused any of his wives so who are we to do that' (Focus group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015). The men aged 19-35 (23 May 2015) strongly argued against violence against women and any form of domestic abuse. In order to further explain the verse one participant advanced the opinion that:

[W]e don't have to debate that verse, we don't have to do *tafsir* on that verse ... it's just meant to rebuke, it's not meant for you to go and physically beat your wife up to a pulp and a lot of people actually use that verse as their basis for why they've done that. But if you look at it, the Prophet ..., in his *sunnah* has given you the ... solution to that; his wife was disobedient to him so he had fall back on that verse. What did he do? He told them that if you don't listen I'm going to hit you with a hundred lashes – he didn't hit them with a hundred lashes, he took a hundred sticks, he tied them together and ... he touched them – hundred lashes done. So the solution is provided in *sunnah* ... He rebuked them, he punished them. Simple. He didn't beat them up, he didn't humiliate them, he found a way to fulfil the command and treat them as human, treat them as an equal (Focus group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

This comment by one of the participants assumes that an individual who reads this verse is aware of the manner in which the Prophet gave a solution to it. This is a problematic assumption as the person reading this verse could interpret it as enforcing physical violence upon one's wife should the need arise. These views were understood and supported by two participants. Not all participants, however, felt that there was no contradiction between Islam and gender equality. One participant found it difficult to reconcile his Islamic faith and passionate views for gender equality and human rights. He questioned whether or not 'rebuking' one's wife is not an infringement on her rights. To this, another participant said that at times God may or may not give a reason for a particular command depending on

whether He thinks his followers will be able to adequately understand it. He added the following:

In philosophy ... we were told in ethics ... there's a section called 'Divine Law', 'Divine Theory' – [it says] God gives us a command and He may or may not give us a reason for it, if He gives us a reason [it's] because He feels we are adequate enough to understand it, if He does not give us a reason, obviously our understanding is not adequate (Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

The men were unable to reach an agreement on whether or not 'rebuking' can be seen as an infringement of a woman's rights but decided to "agree to disagree" (Focus group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015). They made this decision as none of them felt 'sufficiently educated' to make such a judgement. Apart from this participant, none of the other participants discussed nor suggested that the idea of 'punishing', 'rebuking' or 'scourging' one's wife is a very strong way of dealing with domestic relationships and therefore is problematic. It can be argued that the participants are so 'devout' to the Qur'an that they would not interrogate the translations as it is understood to be 'the word of God'. In addition, the women in the 19-35 focus group (17 May 2015) used the example of women receiving less inheritance than a man to enunciate their views that the verse is applicable to men being the "protectors" of women. A respondent added "with regards to inheritance men get more because women aren't expected to use of their wealth and they are meant to be taken care of" (Focus group, Women 17 May 2015).

The representative from the Jamiat had a dissenting and different view. He did not comment on the interpretation, the meaning of the words nor did he comment on the chosen translation but accepted it for what it was. The Jamiat representative's views were advocated by the men in the 35+ Focus Group too (6 June 2015). Neither the representative nor the men advocated for violence against women and suggested that women who found themselves in that position should leave if possible. A participant from the 35+ Focus Group (6 June 2015) argued that:

The Qur'an is referred to as *Al-Furqaan* – the determination of right and wrong, if Allah says in the Qur'an ... you're entitled to use a degree of physical force ... [then] we listen, we obey, ... if Allah says you can do that we can do it. So what have the jurists done on that *aayat* – they've defined what the limits are ... if you take the position that says the raising of the hand at any given time, under any circumstance is wrong then I think you're

taking the view contrary to what the Qur'an is. Do I think that it's necessary in my life? No, it's never been necessary but if somebody were to say I'm allowed to do this ... within the bounds of *shariah* [then] I have no difficulty. The *aayat* ... says if you fear disobedience or rebellion. If you take the whole *aayat*, [it] starts off by saying you have an authority over; there is a rule established and provided it's *shariah* compliant [it's fine].

In other words this rule is not there for a husband to say anything that is *haraam* [and] he forces his wife to do then he can't say I fear rebellion I'm going to rely on the *aayat* – that's nonsense. But for example if he says I want you when you leave this house to wear *hijab* and she says no – that is rebellion. ... Anything that he has authority over that is in accordance to Islam, if she refuses to obey it, is rebellion. But can you do it will-nilly – no. From a *tafsir* point of view you must look at the greatest community that ever lived and see how they practiced that *aayat* because that gives you a determination, ... it's been very clear throughout Islam that we look to the Prophet ..., the companions, to see how they practiced from the various *aayats* to get some guidance – I can think of NO example where somebody said the food's not right let me smack you, or I want more sugar let me smack you – because that is *haraam* (Focus group, Men 35+, 6 June 2015).

This particular argument voices two earlier arguments made by respondents in the focus groups and interviews. First, one needs to read the Qur'an and use the life of the Prophet as a living example of what is written in the Qur'an. Finally, it resembles arguments made by the women in the 35+ age group, in which the women also argued that a degree of force can be used if the woman is rebelling against something that is Islamic. It is essential to note that the men and women in the younger generation unanimously agreed there was no instance that would warrant a man using physical force against a woman. This could perhaps indicate that the younger generations are far less accepting and sympathetic of such incidences regardless of the intention or reason.

The idea of women's status and role was combined with clear views about hierarchies of power. When responding to questions, both the representative from the Jamiat and the men in the 35+ focus group (6 June 2015) were clear about being firm believers in gender roles and men being the head of a household. The representative from the Jamiat argued that:

We also believe that a family cannot run with two co-equal authorities ... Allah has placed [the responsibility of being the head of the household] upon the shoulders of the man, is it an aspect for him to abuse? No. ... it comes with a whole bag of responsibilities, about which he would be questioned about ... the solution to abusive authority is not to eradicate authority, it is to put steps into place ... to see that that

authority is not abused. And in Islam ... the step that is put into place is this ... just as the wife is under your authority, you are under a higher authority and that authority is the authority of Allah, who will question you about how you treat your wife. That is why in our *shariah*, the commands and the *aayats* that are read in *Nikah* are pertaining to fearing Allah. ... All three *aayats* that are read at the time of *Nikah*, [speak about] ‘fear[ing] Allah’, why, so that even in your moments of privacy, when you think you are alone with your spouse remember Allah is watching you ... and you are going to be accountable for the way in which you deal with those who are under your authority (Interview, Jamiat, 24 March 2015).

Thus, it is clear from their own discourse, that the men in the 35+ focus group and the representative from the Jamiat support a patriarchal system and if they were in a situation where they thought their wives were being disobedient or rebellious they would justify any action with reference to this verse. In addition, the representative from the Jamiat emphasised the need for Muslims to remember God at all times and although this point may have merit people do not always manage to do so. An example of this can be seen from views expressed in the focus group held with women aged 35+ (15 May 2015). The women argued that indeed God is omnipresent, however, if a man has been “drinking, gambling, or drugging” and is going against the teachings of Islam, then in that moment of his rage, how does one make such a man remember God (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015)? Theoretically, preaching ‘remember you are accountable to God’ is a fair point, but practically speaking it is often not implementable.

The contentious discourse around Chapter 4 Verse 34 can also be seen when looking at case studies of domestic violence in Muslim communities globally. Douki et al. (2013) conducted research in Arab and Islamic countries mainly Egypt, Palestine, Israel and Tunisia. Their research indicated that in many instances, especially when locating domestic violence within an Islamic context, men and sometimes even women justify the abuse by using the above mentioned verse. Their research has shown that:

Violent husbands claim the right to discipline their wives as they see fit because their religious and legal duties reinforce beliefs that their wives must obey the husband, who is the maintainer of the household. Islamic law, in common with most other systems of law, recognises the husband’s right to discipline his wife for disobedience (Douki et al., 2003:168).

The response from the research conducted by Douki et al. (2003) is not unique to Muslim communities in the Middle East only. A similar response arises from the work by Al-Hibri (2003). She reports that in the United States, KARAMAH: a non-profit organisation¹¹ received calls from Muslim women complaining about domestic violence. The women who called in generally did not receive support from their family, female friends nor religious leaders. In many instances women were blamed for the experience and situation they found themselves in and it was believed that a man “had the right to “chastise” his wife” (Al-Hibri, 2003:196). Amongst Muslims both globally and locally it can be argued that there are two trains of thoughts; those who use Verse 34 to justify domestic violence, and those who in spite of the verse, argue that the Prophet Muhammad, who as mentioned earlier, is regarded as the best human being, never hit his wives therefore how can we enforce such actions.

The whole discussion about chastisement and domestic violence is confined to marriage and conjugal relations. The reason for this is because the chapter in the Qur’an begins by discussing marriage. And the discussion of the verse generally speaks about domestic violence within marriage. This is not to say that domestic violence does not occur outside of marriage and in other intimate relationships. As in other religions such as Christianity and Judaism as well as on a societal level, marriage is a pivotal aspect of life and is held in high regard. The Qur’an speaks about the value of marriage stating “He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest, peace of mind in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo, herein indeed are signs for people who reflect” (Qur’an, 30:21). However, in an interview with a representative from Islamic Careline (30 March 2015), she said:

[T]here is a growing trend of domestic violence taking place before marriages. Courting before marriage is something that Muslims indulge in and in some instances it gets violent (Interview, Islamic Careline, 30 March 2015).

The representative went on to say that they have had instances where men were verbally and physically abusive towards their partners while they were courting. Thus anecdotal evidence suggests that domestic violence takes place across all levels in society and in various types of relationships. Yet these actions clearly contradict the norms and values

¹¹ KARAMAH: “Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights is a non-profit organization committed to promoting human rights globally, especially gender equity, religious freedom and civil rights in the United States. It pursues its mission through education, legal outreach and advocacy”. See more at <http://karamah.org/>

embedded within Islam. Because extra marital relations before marriage are prohibited in Islam, this verse cannot be deployed or used as a justification by abusive individuals during courtship.

The interpretations of Chapter 4 Verse 34 vary from earlier translations which gave a set of actions which a husband can employ – “admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them” (Pickthall 1922). This sequence changed with later interpreters who argued that a husband should “admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then beat them” (Asad, 2003). The translations used above imply that with newer translations the sequence of events have changed. More recent translations closely mimic the ones made by Ali (1946) and N.J. Dawood (1956), which then influence the kinds of interpretations made, and tells us about the interpreter and the context he/she is interpreting from.

In conclusion, in the analysis of Chapter 4 Verse 34, the perceptions of the informants brought to the surface how the discursive constructions of domestic violence essentially justified it. Only one participant found the idea of ‘punishing’, ‘rebuking’ or ‘scourging’ one’s wife as problematic and an infringement on her human rights. Is it necessary for any form of force or violence to be used in a domestic realm? The participants clung to the idea of interpretation to pave a way forward for them or simply clung to the lived example given by the Prophet. However, it is not the extent to which one enforces this idea of punishment; it is the fact that it should even take place. It can be argued that to an extent a husband has the right ‘to discipline or punish his wife’. The participants use the life of the Prophet to indicate the extent to which ‘violence’ can be enforced. And therefore, implies that in some instances and to a certain extent violence can be enforced. There thus appears to be something of a mismatch between the current international human rights regime and what is written in the Qur’an. In terms of these international prescriptions, it can be argued that in 2016 this verse should not be applicable as there are alternate ways in which to resolve domestic disputes. The problem with implementing a ‘soft punishment’ such as a tap on the shoulder, or a tap with a hundred sticks is that it has an effect on the morale and psyche of abused women. Can this very action not be viewed or understood as domestic violence?

Chapter 5: Perceptions of Intimate Family Violence

Broadly, this chapter seeks to discuss the significance of culture and society in the discussion of domestic violence amongst select Muslims in Johannesburg. It will begin with a discussion about education and socialisation. Education, socialisation, culture and community were terms that were raised and discussed by all participants. The respondents felt that one's education and socialisation affect gender roles, the relationships between men and women before and in marriage and most of all it affects the manner in which one understands and in some instances justifies domestic violence. This chapter shows how these four seemingly different words were intertwined and how the respondents' either used them interchangeably or picked them apart in order to get their views across.

5.1. Education, Socialisation and the Status of the Jamiat

The topic of culture versus religion was important for all participants in the focus groups particularly the women in the 35+, 19-35 and the men in the 19-35 focus groups. The participants argued there is a distinction between religion and culture even though sometimes the lines are blurred. They further argued that the manner in which society has been socialised is linked to religion or culture. Due to the fact that all of the respondents besides one, were Muslim Indian meant their arguments stemmed from the belief that many of the 'restrictions' or 'oppressions' that Muslims, especially Muslim women face are derived from socially constructed ideas. These ideas can be linked to the cultural heritage of Indian people. The reasons given by the respondents was that their ancestors come from India and therefore most of them have been taught and socialised in the context of that historical and cultural way of life. Even though Muslim Indians live in South Africa and some have not visited India for years, if at all, many of those customs are still practiced by them today. In effect, it has become a hegemonic discourse within the Muslim Indian community. A woman participant in the 19-35 focus group explained that in her opinion society had confused culture and religion and that the gender roles women were expected to ascribe to "are more culturally and socially ascribed as opposed to religiously" (Focus Group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015). Abusharaf (2006) explains the cultural/religious binary well by arguing that:

[S]tudies have shown that religion influences gender relations and outcomes, but the effects of specific religious affiliations vary, due to different interpretations and obligations of codes of conduct in cultural settings (Abusharaf, 2006:716)

Haeri (quoted in Abusharaf) proposes that the tensions between religion and culture are an outcome of the restrictions placed on female agency. This analysis “has established that old traditions have become accepted as religious simply because they are persistent. It is fundamentally important to note that some of these practices are based on cultural norms” (Haeri cited in Abusharaf, 2006:722). The arguments of the men in the 19-35 focus group were premised on the fact that if all individuals received both a secular and religious education, they would be able to distinguish between culture and religion. They gave the example of Khadija, wife of the Prophet Muhammad who was the most educated women in Islam at the time, to show that when Muslims argue that women are not allowed to receive an education, it is rather an idea that stems from Indo-Pak and Arab culture as opposed to Islam itself. The participant stated that “we’ve actually co-mingled tradition with Islamic belief and it’s actually taking away the equality from males and females” (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

The women in the 35+ focus group focused their response on the need for women to educate themselves so that they would become aware of their rights. One participant argued that Muslim women can make any demands/requests stipulated and written in their marriage contract but many women were unaware of this fact. She argued the reason for this is two-fold – first, women do not have knowledge of this fact and secondly, women themselves do not educate themselves, hence they do not know about their rights. She also made clear that it was not Islam that was at fault, but rather women themselves. The participant said:

[I]f we are educated and we know our rights ... then everything is fine. ... It’s no problem with Islam, it’s the fact that we are the issue [other women murmur agreement] – we have our own blooming hang ups; we don’t enact what we’ve been given in the best and fairest way (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

Other factors that might lead to women’s lack of knowledge were not brought into the discussion, such as women’s lack of access to education due to upbringing and cultural beliefs, marginalisation, and even poverty. To some extent this reflects their class position. Other women in this focus group felt the same as the men in the 19-35 focus group – that

their ideas stem from cultural beliefs that were passed down from generation to generation. They reiterated that it is important to know the difference between Islam and culture.

The representative from the Jamiat focused his response slightly differently, arguing that education should be a prerequisite for both men and women. However, he directed his response to pre-marital programmes that give men and women the opportunity to understand their roles within the family unit and in marriage. He did not comment on cultural or religious views but rather reinforced his belief in conventional hetero-normative gender roles and the fact that in his opinion men and women have different functions to fulfil.

The status of the Jamiat in the Muslim communities in Johannesburg is important in terms of understanding its influence over perceptions and beliefs. As stated in the previous chapter, the Jamiat is one of the largest Muslim governing bodies in South Africa yet all of the respondents with the exception of Islamic Careline were antagonistic towards them. This is largely explained by the fact that Islamic Careline is a sub-section of the Jamiat and works closely with them. There is evidence that the Jamiat did engage with the issue of violence against women (VAW). In 2013 the Jamiat, in a combined effort with the Minister of Women, Children and People with Disability, Lulu Xingwana and the National Religious Leaders Council (NRLC) arranged a “Focus Week-End” that aimed to highlight issues surrounding violence against women and children. This initiative was focused on alerting the congregations to religious views on violence against women and children. The Jamiat prepared a document for Mosques, which was theirs to edit as they deemed appropriate for a talk to be given to the congregations. In their talk the Jamiat (2013:1) suggested that violence undermined South Africa’s economic and social development and this problem “affects people from all walks of life regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, age and religion”. In their talk the Jamiat argued that:

[T]he position of Islam on the kind treatment of women is very clear as mentioned in the Qur’an and exemplified through the life and character of [Prophet Muhammad]. It has been argued that the Prophet has said “[t]he most perfect of believers in belief is the best of them in character. The best of you are those who are the best to their women” (Jamiat, 2013:1).

The Jamiat went on to say, “that a husband’s treatment of his wife reflects a Muslim’s good character, which in turn is a reflection of his faith (Jamiat, 2013:1). The Jamiat

acknowledged that conflicts and arguments are unavoidable in marriage. However, anger should not be allowed to consume partners. But more importantly, “[u]nder no circumstance, even when he is angry or somehow feels justified, is a husband allowed to humiliate [his wife] by using hurtful words or cause her any injury” (Jamiat, 2013:1). Of particular significance is that the Jamiat (2013:1) urged the congregation to:

- speak up about domestic violence and not be a bystander,
- seek help if anyone in the congregation is violent and/or abusive to their partners and/or children,
- provide support for abused women and children, and learn about the various support structures that are available for women and children,
- lastly, to understand how their attitudes and actions could perpetuate abuse against women and children.

Despite ‘these efforts’ made by the Jamiat, the respondents did not have faith in them, nor did they view them as a viable option to turn to for assistance. The focus group informants did not believe that the Jamiat could be relied on to give the necessary support to people who suffered abuse. This raises questions about the Jamiat’s role, influence and leadership on the issue of gender violence.

The women in the 35+ focus group were disheartened by the fact that in their opinion they could not go to the Jamiat for assistance on issues surrounding domestic abuse. A participant suggested that one reason for this was that in her opinion the Jamiat are “not in touch with talking to females” (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015). She said that in many instances the Jamiat found it easier to simply tell women that they would be rewarded if they were patient (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015). This participant believes this idea of being rewarded for your patience in this life or the afterlife is one that has “cowed” women into submission. This idea is derived from Islamic belief that this world is a test, that everything one does should be for the pleasure of God and that you would be rewarded for your good deeds and patience by entering heaven. Yet this flies in the face of another view, that as much as one may live for the pleasure of God and entering heaven, one needs to look after oneself and interests in this life as well.

The other women in this focus group thought that members of the Jamiat would most likely send women back to their abusive husbands and tell them to be patient and pray that this time will pass. A participant said:

[A]ccording to me they have [not] made enough effort to make ... change[s] in men and ... we suffer the consequences until we get educated. ... Those who suffer, [it] is because of ignorance and because [the Jamiat hasn't] got the systems in place to help empower them, so the easiest thing for them is [to say] you make *sabr* (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

The other women agreed and shared the same sentiments. Another participant added that “[g]oing to the Jamiat – they will say go home and make *sabr*. How much *sabr* can one make? That Moulana does not wear your shoes” (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015). To this, another respondent said “[m]ake *sabr* to the *Qabr*” (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015). By this the participants meant that women are told to be patient and pray that this moment would pass and that her husband would change. However, she asked, for how long should a woman be patient? Is she meant to be patient until her husband eventually takes her life? Nina Hoel (2013) comments on the importance of *sabr* in her study conducted with Muslim women in South Africa. Through her findings she further argues that:

On the one hand, *sabr* is intentionally cultivated and embodied by believers in order to be and become a certain kind of person. Particular lived experiences, coupled with profound God-consciousness, inform and may strengthen an individual's capacity for *sabr*. On the other hand, *sabr* forms part of a particular religious discourse within which complex interpersonal relationships, and relationships between believers and God, is lived. The virtue of *sabr* becomes a site where power is wielded, in and through these intricate relationships, and illustrates the relational nature of power in corporeal and spiritual interactions (Hoel, 2013:36).

The above quotation along with the arguments made by the respondents depicts the importance *sabr* plays in Muslim communities. The psychological and emotional hold that society, culture and especially religion have over women is brought into focus by this evidence. A participant who was a convert to Islam and comes from a Western background argued that it is the way women have been socialised and taught to deal with situations that very often leave them in a position of powerlessness. She added:

It's something they've been taught, to be submissive, to just accept it and be patient ... [however,] whether you look at it from an Islamic perspective or a legal one – [domestic abuse is] not supposed to happen (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

The opinions of the women in this focus group differed in fact from what the Jamiat representative actually said. In his interview, he said that if women found themselves in an abusive relationship and were able to leave, they should. Thus, the representative would encourage women to get a divorce if they had the necessary support structure and financial means to do so. While this view seemed to acknowledge the dire position of women in abusive relationships, the Jamiat representative did not go on to discuss what women who have limited avenues of escape should do. It is this conundrum that tended to justify the opinions that the women had of the Jamiat. As depicted and mentioned above, the comment about women being told to be patient and praying that the abuse would end are widespread arguments in Islam.

The men in the 19-35 focus group were also antagonistic towards the Jamiat. Their argument was simple – in their opinion they felt that the Jamiat was not doing enough to address not simply domestic violence but wider social problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, sex outside marriage, and other issues facing the Muslim community and South African society in general. A participant suggested that on a Friday when all men are at the Mosque and the speaker has the attention of the congregation, he should use that platform to discuss important issues such as domestic violence. This participant was particularly critical of the Jamiat:

[I]nstead of the *Moulana* or *Imam* standing up on a Friday afternoon in *Jumuah* and telling me I'm going to go to hell because I haven't read this *Du'aa* and that *Du'aa* and this, maybe take the opportunity ... educate them and tell them, guys this is how you have to deal with situations (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May).

The men argued that as a community the issue of domestic violence was not spoken about enough because it is viewed as “taboo” and that in general Muslim families and the Muslim community in Johannesburg steer clear of discussing issues that are viewed as taboo. The men admitted that *Moulanas* are beginning to discuss and talk about these issues but it was the younger *Moulanas* who brought it up. Like the women in the 35+ focus group these men felt the Jamiat was not doing enough. However, in the interview with the representative of the Jamiat, he said that the Jamiat was vocal about domestic violence. The representative added

that in addition to participating in and supporting the annual 16 days of Activism Against Violence Against Women and urging all Mosques to address the issue at Friday prayers, the Jamiat talks about it on Radio Islam¹². Again, there was a contrast between what the Jamiat was saying and what the respondents argued.

In an interview with Zubeida Dangor, the Director of NISAA Institute for Women's Development, Dangor argued that from her knowledge the Jamiat did not have a history of addressing issues surrounding domestic abuse. She felt that the Jamiat had resisted dealing with domestic abuse, and had kept NISAA "at bay" for many years (Interview, Dangor, 9 April 2015). However, more recently the Jamiat had contacted her and requested that she assist in hosting programmes regarding domestic violence and rape – what it is and how to deal with it. It is clear that while in the past the Jamiat may not have properly dealt with domestic violence, since its engagement with the 16 Days of Activism and with the Ministry of Women, Children and People with Disability, it was attempting to address the issue. What is equally clear is that the Jamiat needs to do much more to gain the confidence of the Muslim community, especially the youth.

5.2. Relationship Between Men and Women In Marriage

The perceptions of relationships between men and women before and during marriage illuminate the meaning of gender and gender equality in the Muslim community. All participants with the exception of one man belonging to the age group of 19-35 focus group argued that Islamically men and women are equal, yet they have different roles to fulfil. The young man who differed in his opinion from the others in this focus group is a university student studying in the Faculty of Humanities. He was more open to challenging hetero-normative ideas and conceptions of gender. An example is that he challenged the idea of equality between men and women in Islam by questioning that if this were so, then why did Islam say that women cannot run businesses, be the Head or CEO of a company or if one woman witnessed infidelity then why did she need another woman to witness it as well before she would be believed. For men, this was different, if a man witnessed a case of infidelity then he did not need any witnesses, his word would be accepted. This participant

¹² Radio Islam is a national and international radio station. They aim "to promote the message of Islam. It has also become synonymous with Islamic values and a tool to dispel misconceptions relating to Islam and Muslims in South Africa and abroad". See more at www.radioislam.org

asked whether ‘Islam is saying that the value of two women is equivalent to one man’ (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

To this another respondent answered that he did not think that this meant that two women were worth one man. Rather, he thought that this was so because “women tend to be more emotional in their reasoning and judgement” (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015). This led to an argument in the group. The participant who brought the conversation up as well as the other participants argued that this comment was subjective and sexist as it was not always the case that women were emotional. The participant who began this conversation ended it by saying that he knows Islam elevates the status of women, but if the interpretations of the Qur’an alludes to ideas of inequality between men and women, then it needs to be questioned and challenged. This debate reflects both the fluidity of thinking among some young Muslims, but also reflects the deep-seated stereotypes that exist amongst members of the Muslim community regardless of age and education.

Another stereotype was brought up by the women in the 19-35 focus group who argued that society had different standards for men and women. They argued that a woman’s virginity and chastity was more valued than that of a man’s. The women argued that this view was not Islamic, as losing one’s virginity before marriage was not permissible for either men or women. Yet they also acknowledged that men have more leeway, and “can do whatever they want, [but for women] it’s like a dark mark on your name forever” (Focus Group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015). The women in this focus group also felt that in Eastern and Indian cultures boys are valued more; this can be seen as parents and families celebrate more jubilantly when a boy child is born. They found this strange as Islamically speaking they knew of many teachings which depict that women have a higher value. On the other hand, the women in the older, 35+ focus group, argued that in their view, boys and girls are valued equally. However, they acknowledged that in some families there was greater celebration when a boy child was born. However, they rejected the perception from the outside that this provided evidence for the view that Muslim women were “oppressed”. They were not. A participant reiterated:

Islamically we actually have equal rights, it’s just ... we are male and female ... But it’s also how we’re ... taught. In the olden times they weren’t really educated, so there you said ok the man must ‘wear the pants’ and not the woman, but today ... women can stand

up for [their] rights too, Islamically. So we mustn't really feel like we [are] being oppressed, we're not being oppressed, if you allow yourself to be oppressed then that's your decision (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

There are a number of analytical points to be made from that comment. First, the participant refers to a time when women were not educated, and assumes that in 2016 all women receive an education. This belies the reality where class determines who has access to more than primary education. Secondly, the assumption that uneducated women are the only ones who are abused is problematic, as gender based violence and domestic abuse cross-cuts all cultural, religious, ethnic, racial or class divisions. Lastly, by arguing that women who are oppressed are to be blamed for their own oppression because it is their decision to remain in the marriage, is again problematic as there are many factors that contribute to a woman's subordination. It is incorrect to draw a correlation between domestic abuse, class and education as domestic abuse takes place across all levels in society and amongst people belonging to diverse backgrounds.

There is a difference between the beliefs of the women in both focus groups, reflecting clear generational differences. It is not entirely clear why there is an incongruence of opinion between the two groups. Partly the older women are embedded within the normative conventions of patriarchy, which accords practices of respect and protection to women (and others). On the other hand, the younger group are more attuned to the effects of patriarchal and hetero-normative ideas that infiltrate society and are therefore more willing to challenge them. Indeed, the women in the 35+ focus group felt "privileged to be treated differently" (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015). They were proud of their Muslim identity and argued that men and women are equal, but have distinctive and different roles to fulfil. A participant said, referring to the honour accorded to women:

The other thing I also noticed is the other faiths have actually admired [Muslim] women and their status. Whereas they have to go out and earn that extra ... amount, Muslim women have always been given the honour of being a housewife, so in that sense as Muslim women we feel honoured to be where we are (Focus Group, Women 35, 15 May 2015).

This participant's thoughts were backed up by the arguments made by the men in the 35+ focus group. The men argued that it was the duty of Muslim men to 'take care' of Muslim women. A participant put it this way:

[T]he rights of women have been prioritised in the manner in which we have to care for them, in the manner in which we deal with them. Also to the extent of what her place is in the family system – you know how high she’s been ranked and the duties of the husband towards her. You will find that she stands out unbelievably as the head if not higher than the head of the family and any person who marries ... has to give her what she is entitled to ... in the family system, she must be cared for. That makes the difference between a woman in Western societies – where a woman is emancipated in her right to earn a living and cater for a family, in Islam it’s the other way, the man must cater for the woman and she runs the situation in the house, she mustn’t be dictated to and obviously her [responsibilities] are also set out towards her; obligation to her children, her obligation towards her husband, her obligation towards her family members – all that is also set out very clearly. ... I would say there’s an enormous amount of respect and status that is given to women. In Western societies we give her that liberation, you can become the director of a company, or you give her some form of leadership qualities and you say you can do this, we are giving you that aspect of becoming a director of a company or can be head of a country, in Islam a woman is higher than those values (Focus Group, Men 35+, 6 June 2015).

This perspective reflects the norms and values coming from an ‘older’ generation that indicate the value placed on gender roles that assign women to the ‘private’ realm, in a set of relationships of mutual respect, but with clear boundaries of power, authority and responsibility. Being a wife, a mother, and a ‘housewife’ is conceived as a much higher status than breaking the glass ceiling in the corporate world. So even though on the surface the focus groups of the older women and men supported the idea of gender equality and of women being educated and even working outside the home – from their responses it can be argued that with this specific group of women and men, the ideal woman is one who is married, has a family and works at home.

As shown in the previous chapter the men in the 35+ focus group and the representative from the Jamiat were firm believers in gender roles. The representative from the Jamiat argued that while they believe in equal rights, they have clear views on the functions, tasks and responsibilities of each gender. He said that the roles women and men play are related to the natural, biological and genetic make-up of men and women which is ordained by God. He made the obvious point that “pregnancy, breastfeeding and motherhood” are the sole domain of women (Interview, Jamiat, 24 March 2015). However, it was clear from his various responses that the understanding of gender roles was based on hetero-normativity. Gender roles are not only dependent on nature but also on the socially constructed gender binaries created within Enlightenment thought. His views were supported by the men in the 35+ focus

group. Like participants in the other focus groups, the men argued that women have different roles to play, however, they believe that a woman is “always the head of a family in terms of looking after the family” (Focus Group, Men 35+, 6 June 2015). One participant elaborated that:

Of course she’s also entrusted in her ways. ... Islam ... doesn't stop any woman from excelling in anything – she can educate herself at home or at university but her responsibility if she’s married still lies in the family, so that’s vitally important in terms of the Muslim family and of course the stability of the family (Focus Group, Men 35+, 6 June 2015).

The above quotation is quite explicit about the opinions of the men in the 35+ focus group, that women should always be the head of the family *in the domestic realm* and that that is her priority. This idea that women are responsible for running the household and men are the bread winners is common to most societies across the globe, and remains a normative belief and practice. In addition, children are socialised into these beliefs. The outcome of this generally leads women to becoming dependent on men for financial stability. As far back as 1954, Talcott Parsons (1954:223-224), exemplifies the Western perspective that suggested that women played the “expressive” role in the family such as nurturing, caregiving and maintaining harmony. Bidwell and Vander Mey (2007:74) propose an alternative wording, to suggest that men played the “instrumental” roles of providing food, shelter, clothing and other essential survival needs through paid employment. A woman’s position within a family was clearly defined as “...that of her husband’s wife, the mother of his children” (Parsons, 1954:223-224). These views have not changed since. Even within the different set of traditions and values in Muslim communities, these kinds of arguments are reflected in the interviews. These sentiments feature in the broader Muslim global dialogue. Noor O’Neill Borbieva (2012) discusses the manner in which a group of women in southern Kyrgyzstan view gender roles:

The devout women I worked with did not reject the basic assumptions of the dominant gender discourse that a woman’s job is to raise children and create a happy and harmonious home while a man’s job is to support the family by working in the public sphere (Borbieva, 2012:10).

Interestingly, in their responses to questions generally, the men in the 35+ focus group kept comparing Islam with the West. They reiterated time and again that Islam was the first

religion to give women rights and respect, an argument that was enunciated by participants in both the men and women 19-35 focus groups. A woman participant from the 35+ focus group who is a convert Muslim also argued that Muslim women are privileged and have many rights. She compared her western background to her understanding of Islam:

I come from a Western mentality and upbringing ... it's great to say ... in the constitution men and women are equal, but ... women in this country get paid 1/3 less than men so it's not equal, a lot of times a man will get a job over a woman ... when you look at it from an Islamic perspective ... [Muslim women] are privileged. Muslim women are held in very high regard, you have a lot more freedom than what a Western woman would have. Yes there [are] certain things that Muslim women aren't allowed to do and when you look at the benefit of why you not allowed to do it, it's for our own protection, whereas if you doing it in a Western world you land up with a lot of mental illnesses. There's no such thing as gender equality (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

This response provides a somewhat stark rendering of women's position in Islam. First, her adamant rejection of Western values perhaps proclaims the conviction of a convert. But is also coloured by the fact that she was married to an abusive non-Muslim from whom she fled in the arms of the new religion. This may explain her bias against Western culture.

Turning to the question of women's subordination and oppression within Islam, the representative from the Jamiat responded that there were restrictions placed on all members of society and these restrictions were not always bad or detrimental. He said:

I think that there is no rule or law that does not have some certain types of restrictions. Restrictions per se are not against the dignity of human beings, if everyone says that I want a life without any restrictions, for example I'm not going to drive on the left hand side of the road because South Africa guarantees freedom, I want to drive on the right hand side of the road; people will say you have to follow basic guidelines and that comes from authority, that comes from a proper running of a government, a proper running of infrastructure, a proper running of any type of some sort of system without which there will not be any system, there will be chaos. If there is no proper system it will always result in chaos. In a similar manner whatever we feel that there are any restrictions that come about because of the Islamic law, there are restrictions placed upon both males and females, which comes not from authority – the way we regard restrictions placed upon human activities, based on proper system of the society – that we drive on the left hand side, stop at the red robot, move at the green light – we regard that to be part and parcel of a proper system of an organised community. We believe whatever restrictions there are both upon male and female it is from divine orders which the objective is the better

running of the human society. ... We believe that there is an authority higher than a human or human institution or human authority and that comes from Almighty Allah ... restrictions [are] not necessarily against the dignity of human beings (Interview, Jamiat, 24 March 2015).

At the basis of his belief, is that Islamically men and women are valued equally, and daughters are a blessings (Interview, Jamiat, 24 March 2015). However, he advocates for quite specific roles in public and private for men and women – a hetero-normative gendered society. In so far as the respondents valued equality, many expressed views that clung to the idea of a gendered society socialised within a Muslim cultural and religious context.

5.3. Nostalgia for the Past and Denial

Key to the perceptions about domestic violence in Muslim communities, were the encounters and responses in all of the focus groups and interviews to the question about whether or not Muslim women were beaten or abused. In every interview conducted besides the one with Dangor, the respondents' immediate reaction was that 'all women from all cultures and religions are abused; it is not a Muslim only problem'. The responses were somewhat defensive as if to say that domestic abuse only takes place in some instances and on very rare occasions in Muslim homes. A representative from Islamic Careline said the following:

Yes Muslim women are beaten, so are Christians, so are Jews, so are Africans. Domestic violence is global, it's universal and a lot of cultures are patriarchal, more so than people like to admit. The African culture is very patriarchal ... domestic violence is all over the world and it has nothing to do with religion (Interview, Islamic Careline, 24 March 2015).

The work that Islamic Careline undertakes is to offer support and counselling to any member of the public – including non-Muslims – on any social issues. The issue of gender violence is part of broader social programmes aimed at uplifting and assisting the community. Thus, her response was not to focus on the specificity of the nature of domestic violence in Muslim homes, but rather to downplay its significance. For her, the problem was simply a generic one, which had nothing to do with Islam. Thus although she, like Dangor would be in a perfect position to openly discuss the rates of domestic violence in the Muslim community in Johannesburg, this did not emerge from the interview. However, unlike Dangor, instead of

openly addressing the fact of domestic abuse in Muslim communities, and its solutions, she was defensive, downplaying its incidence.

Her views were mirrored by a participant from the men's 19-35 focus group. He argued that in general domestic abuse does not take place in Muslim homes; however, he acknowledged that there were cases where it does happen. His views were supported by the other participants of this focus group. Another participant argued that in his experience he had not heard nor knew of any Muslim woman who had been "beaten". In his words, he argued that "at the same time I don't think we can just specifically say Muslim women. Any woman could be beaten" (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015). The men in both groups were defensive, and from their responses, even offended by the question as they thought it made Muslim men look bad. Another participant added that he did not think it fair to label domestic abuse "as a Muslim only thing"; he did however acknowledge that he was aware of some cases in Muslim families where domestic abuse had taken place (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

The men in the 35+ focus group were concerned about the role of the media and their portrayal of Islam and Muslim communities. The men argued that whenever something occurs in a Muslim community or amongst Muslims, the media would portray it in such a way that the issue becomes synonymous with Islam. For example the media has influenced people to believe and think that all Muslims are terrorists. A participant further added that:

You can't say that crimes against women are conceived to be crimes committed by Muslims against Muslim women because they're a small percentage of it. And ... if you want to do research of that and look at the percentage of Muslim women that are married ... you'll find that it's a very small percentage of women [who are] abused [in] the Muslim community. It's a very small percentage (Focus Group, Men 35+, 6 June 2015).

This view of the focus of the research, and the questions about domestic violence in the Muslim community, were politely dismissed by the representative of the Jamiat. He said:

You know those types of things are [such] wide statements, there is abuse in every community in society, even by those who are famous ... I would challenge people and say that if we were to survey the women of our community, whilst there would be abuse and I would never ever deny that aspect. I think if you take it as a group, I think Muslim

women ... comparatively to other women in other groups, might come out surprisingly better off (Interview, Jamiat, 24 March 2015).

The women in the 19-35 focus group also agreed with the arguments made by the men in both focus groups and by the representative from the Jamiat. They suggested that there were instances of domestic violence, but that it was committed “by people who don’t live Islamically” (May 17). To justify their arguments, a participant argued that domestic abuse can be related to alcohol abuse. The participant said: “if you go to a police station and you ask them how many incidences of domestic violence are reported and how many of them are related to alcohol abuse that will just prove the point” (Focus Group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015).

Whilst later in the interview the women gave a range of reasons as to why domestic violence took place, this initial comment stuck with me. First, this comment creates an ‘us and them’ distinction. So men who do not follow the teachings of Islam and men who are alcohol abusers commit violations against women. Secondly, the comment comes across as judgemental towards individuals who do not practice Islam in the same way as this participant. Lastly, it showed some naivety of some members of the Muslim community who think that alcohol abuse is the only reason for why domestic abuse takes place. However, a counter argument was made by another participant in the same focus group. She argued that “reported [incidences of] domestic violence cannot be taken as a benchmark or the average because I don’t think Muslim people are going to report that” (Focus Group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015). This raises the question, not so much that Muslim women are beaten, but rather the denial of the participants that domestic abuse is a problem in Muslim communities. This begs the question why are Muslims oblivious or in denial to the epidemic?

The women in the 35+ focus group answered in a similar fashion to the men in the 35+ focus group – they argued that domestic violence is a problem “across the board”. However, like the women in the 19-35 focus group and the Jamiat, a participant argued that in her opinion she thinks it takes place “less in Islam ... because of our religion; also our culture tells us don’t raise your hand to women” (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015). She starts with religion as a proscription to gender abuse, but suggests that culture offers a prohibition. She was unclear as to which culture she was referring to; whether she meant Indian, Islamic or South African culture, or all three. This distinction is important because

individuals have multiple identities and can ascribe to more than one culture. Her response shows a depiction of the cultural/religious binary that was discussed in the beginning of this chapter. It also shows how the lines are often blurred and in some instances individuals use it synonymously without critically interrogating what this actually means. Another participant argued:

[In] the past ... guys never did that. Yes we heard of a grand uncle who would throw the dish if it wasn't the right salt or whatever, so the violence came out on things not a wife ... yes maybe it was hidden but you had that extended family network which was deterrent enough, now what you do behind closed doors there's no accountability ... and before there was the great aunt sitting and she would see the bruises and would say what the hell did you do, she had that power to call him to account (Focus Group, Women 35+, 17 May 2015).

To this another respondent added that the abuse does not have to be physical so perhaps in the past it was more verbal and emotional abuse and that is why it was not spoken of. The points made by these participants are interesting in that they suggest that the extended family was a form of social control that limited any form of violence or violation of cultural values. Thus in the past the public/private distinction was not necessarily of significance in Muslim households, if abuse took place within the confines of the home, generally referred to as the private, there were other people present to put a break on such behaviour. It was not a private matter but rather a family issue that needed to be dealt with (Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld, 2005).

Finally, women in the 35+ focus group were also defensive in the face of domestic violence. One of the participants was a domestic abuse survivor and another participant had a cousin in an abusive relationship. Another participant spoke of the lack of avenues of escape for women, as well as the lack of support for abused women. Yet despite the conversation, and diversity of women's experience, the women did not accept that domestic violence was a problem facing the Muslim community. In addition, and most importantly, the women seemed more accepting of emotional and psychological abuse and did not view it as grave an injustice as physical abuse.

5.4. Conceptions of Intimacy and How People Talk About Domestic Violence

The words one chooses to use or not use to answer a question says a lot about the person, their thoughts, beliefs, the environment they live in and background they come from. This is especially true when looking at the conceptions of intimate relationships and how people speak about domestic violence. Generally speaking my participants were aware that domestic violence and abuse did not relate to physical abuse only. However, in the men 19-35 focus group, a participant said that domestic violence is physical abuse, but suggested that domestic abuse was broader:

[A]buse could be different; abuse could be verbal abuse, umm, like restraining someone from doing something – telling someone they’re not allowed to do this – that could be abuse. And a violent environment is like a physical altercation (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

This distinction is not one that is commonly made – in most cases the terms ‘abuse’ and ‘violence’ are used interchangeably. Instead, he took the meanings of the words quite literally. After hearing his response another participant argued that:

Violence can take on many forms, one is physical, one is emotional, and one is mental ... You could physically beat someone up ... [and] I think [that’s] the more common definition of violence that we know of. In today’s society there [are] far worse things that people do; mental abuse is also termed violence because you are being violent against somebody on an emotional and mental level. ... I think a lot of it is actually emotional abuse these days (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

The participant who took ‘violence’ and ‘abuse’ in a more literal sense, then enquired if domestic violence also refers to a husband who demands and expects his wife to cook, clean and look after the children – so a husband who wants his wife to conform to hetero-normative conceptions of gender roles. To this question, the other men responded by arguing that if the husband imposes this interpretation and the wife agrees to it, then it is not regarded as domestic violence. The only married participant in this focus group argued that Islamically, cooking, cleaning and looking after the children is not the duty of a wife, in contrast to the older group who had argued otherwise. Thereafter, the men reduced the matter to those men who are educated and those who are not. A participant explained:

I honestly believe ... it comes back to education say from our parents and our grandparents time, we talking now the 60s, 70s, 80s even the 90s, there [were] not a lot of Indian Muslim men who went to study ... it was purely because of geo-political reasons as well as apartheid ... so that stigma of women [who] must sit behind the kitchen counter and breed babies and look after babies was something again came from our ancestors ... whereas now what we're seeing is a lot of people are coming to study and people are actually delving into the religion and looking at what their rights ... are (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

Another participant argued that there are traditional conventions placed on both men and women and these “are rooted in a lack of education” (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015). This participant said that:

[S]omeone else out of this group, part of this community ... who didn't have the educational opportunities we have [and may not] have the guidance in understanding these points we brought up ... it's going to be the same case of I'm a husband, I want my wife to do this, if she doesn't do this I will be unhappy with her and I was taught by my father, and grandfather, and uncle that the wife must obey the husband. So I think ... lack of education [is important] (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

Whilst the lack of education might be a contributing factor when understanding why cultural traditions still prevail, many educated people still follow traditional and customary practices within Muslim culture. Their assumption that all those who are educated are open-minded is not a true depiction of society.

Lastly, when discussing whether domestic violence is ever justifiable, the men in the 19-35 focus group unanimously said in no instance can one ever justify domestic abuse. However, the men acknowledged that people are different and react to situations differently. A participant added that the manner in which one deals with situations “says a lot about how you've been raised, if you were raised in an abusive relationship, then violence is your first port of call” (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015). By saying this, the participant was commenting on the cycle of violence theory and how in some instances people are unable or unwilling to escape it. In such situations violence is normalised.

The women in the 35+ focus group had mixed opinions; on the one hand some argued that the Prophet Muhammad never hit any of his wives and if he “had to ... it was with a feather. ... So we're not even allowed to be beaten” (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May

2015). On the other hand, two participants, one a convert to Islam and the other a first generation settler from India, argued that a man is allowed to reprimand his wife if she “steps out of line”. The recent convert to Islam added:

[T]here’s a misunderstanding [with] punishing your wife. There’s different ways to punish your wife and one of the very last resorts should be lifting your hand to your wife – and yes it is allowed as the very, very last resort. But there’s so many other things that you’ve got to do ... I’m going to say ladies if you step out of line he’s allowed to punish you. At the end of the day when he stands before Allah he’s got to account for you as well (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

Upon enquiring what is regarded as “stepping out of line”, the participant responded by saying “backbiting, gossiping, if you are not dressed ... ‘appropriately’ and I’m not specifically ... saying you have to wear *Niqab* but if you’re dressing very revealingly and you are walking out [of the house] and you [are] married ... and also allowing people into the house that you know your husband won’t want [many of the women agreed to this point]” (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015). The participant originally from India added to the list by saying “run around with other guys; go around inviting, soliciting things like that. ... Morally basic [actions which are [un]Islamic]” (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015). Another participant mentioned the fact that if a woman does not read her salaah that is also a problem.

The participant who converted to Islam agreed to the additions the other women made and further added that, “I’m going to say ... it’s right because if a wife isn’t doing what she’s supposed to do and she’s stepping out of line in [terms of what is in the] Qur’an, [then] sweetheart you’ve got to deal [with] your punishment” (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015). The points made by this participant are intriguing as she only discusses a specific reaction: of how a man should react to a woman’s behaviour and not vice-versa. Secondly, her point that a man has to account for a woman’s actions is an internalisation of normative values which enforce and reproduce the inferiority of women within the patriarchal system. In agreement to this another participant argued that:

I am not responsible for what he does ... he is in charge of what goes on in his household, that’s why he gets the right to be able to have me toe the line of what endangers because I am there to look after his home ... some things apply to both, [for example] he shouldn’t be talking about what goes on [in] the bedroom, she shouldn’t be talking about what goes

on [in] the bedroom – so that’s equal. But if he does it that’s his problem, but if I do it then he has the right to curb me ... Does it mean he can beat me up to a pulp – no.

The gradual idea of having us toe the line is limiting certain things ... *Wa-dribuhunna*, that’s the key word ... the design is to have you submit by feeling humiliated because the fact that when we feel humiliated that can make us toe the line, supposedly. ... He is responsible for what I do ... he’s going to be questioned ... so there’s that kind of hierarchy of accountability (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

Four points can be made about this participant’s views. First, the comments reproduce the normative conceptions of gender roles, as if it is the woman’s duty alone to “look after his home”. Yet, in the second place, surely it is their joint home and not his alone. Thirdly, it is clear that she has internalised the relations of power to such an extent that even the ideas that come from her perpetuate patriarchal values and norms. This is the hegemonic ideal. Lastly, like the previous participant this “hierarchy” assumes that men are allowed to act and do as they please, and the only repercussions they will face will be when they meet God on the day of judgement. Whereas, women are accountable to men in this life and to God in the next, on judgement day. This assumes an implicit God-complex that is given to men alone. Although adamantly against domestic abuse, this participant was quite sympathetic towards the difficulties men face and how women torture men. She argued:

You know we don’t realise what an abuse it is for guys. We don’t know how much as females we can abuse the guy – the nag, the endless nag. You know this guy is coming from 9 to 5 working ... his mind is on something, he just wants to de-stress and there you are nagging; fix my plumbing, fix my this, fix my that. ... When I was 16 at varsity, this Muslim woman – a revert ... said you girls don’t know what a *fitna* you are for the guys; we’re in jeans and tops and whatever ... [we] cause [them] so much *fitna* [with our] boobs hanging out. That is an abuse, that is an abuse and that they are not talking about.

I know the *Moulanas*, they don’t say that your boobs are hanging out that’s why we’re telling you to stay home, you know you don’t say it rude and crude but ... it’s always please put on your scarf, be in *hijab*... But the fact is the way, I mean one guy pulled his daughter out of university here because of what; he went to the university and saw the way the women are dressed. Now this desensitisation has happened so much. ... In India the amount of rapes that are going on and if somebody does a politically incorrect thing and says please watch [how] you dress, ok we not there to dictate how anyone dresses but there is an incredible desensitisation. [Dressing appropriately is] a courtesy for the next person also, you know it’s not just about me, I need to be aware about society ... like smelliness, it’s a courtesy to the next person (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

The views shared by this participant show clearly the way that hegemony and discursive constructions work. The first relates to the idea of blaming the victim/survivor for the way she dresses. Patriarchy is so heavily embedded that we socialise women to dress appropriately so that they will not get raped, as opposed to teaching men about consent and that rape is never justifiable. Also this participant does not take into account that women who cover themselves also get raped and so do men. Rape is not dependent on how one dresses, it is about power. The second illustrates the way women justify the abuse that they experience. The idea of a “nagging woman” justifies men’s abuse, and places the blame on women. Thus, women are the authors of their own abuse - ‘why were you nagging him, you should have just kept quiet’. Obviously this perspective is harmful to women, as there are no circumstances where one is justified in inflicting pain by means of force or violence on a woman. Lastly, again her example of *Moulanas* who preach that women should stay in the house, because women do not know how to dress appropriately is insulting. It takes away women’s agency as if women are children and need constant guidance and protection. The participant who expressed these conservative views is well educated. Thus education does not always mean that an individual will have ‘progressive’ perspectives, because in some instances socialisation is so heavily embedded that people are unable to interrogate themselves.

In conclusion, it seems clear that the Jamiat has an ambiguous role in Muslim communities. It is supposed to be the central theological guide for all Muslims. Its authority resides in the networks of Mosques that belong to it. Not all Mosques do so. It is clear from the views of women respondents that they did not trust that the Jamiat would provide theological, psychological or social support for the end to abuse. Equality between men and women is seen as a fundamental value within Islam but gender roles are understood to be ascribed by nature and in some respects are therefore seen as inviolate. As seen in the Qur’an there are several different interpretations of men’s power and authority. The previous chapter showed that men’s right to discipline women is ambiguous. Women are conceived as heads of the family in the private realm but men are the providers. Thus, materially women remain dependent, despite their ‘honour’ status. All participants including women denied the severity of domestic violence in Muslim communities, claiming that both religion and culture proscribed and prohibited it. However, there was a recognition that the extended family and living conditions tended to limit physical abuse. Yet, there was little acknowledgement of other forms of abuse and control, such as emotional, psychological and economic abuse. Lastly, both men and women are subject to the myths about who is to blame for gender

violence. A good education does not exempt either men or women from holding conservative views that are essential to enabling a deeper and fuller understanding of the factors that account for domestic violence.

Chapter 6: Behind Closed Doors: Avenues of Escape: Public vs. Private and Security

The chapter proceeds by addressing the public and private realms. The boundary between the public and private is important to understand as it gives meaning to the construction of family life. By discussing what the private and public realms mean we get an understanding of the participants' beliefs about intimacy, how they understand and would deal with domestic violence and whether there are solutions or avenues of escape. The idea of honour, shame and embarrassment is significant to the notion of privacy and security of family life. This discussion will uncover issues of denial or myths engendered by the breach of the values embedded in Islamic culture or the religious laws – particularly with regard to gender based violence and violence against women.

During the interviews a question was posed to the respondents about where they think domestic violence occurs. The representative from the Jamiat argued that in his opinion domestic abuse takes place “in the privacy of the home” (Interview, Jamiat, 24 March 2015). The representative further argued:

Well it does happen outside and there are instances where it happened. But of course there would be a degree of shame and embarrassment. Although sometimes when people get angry they don't look at that, but there is a degree of shame and embarrassment to do it in front of people. So basically it would be in the privacy of the home.

In response to this question a respondent from the men's 19-35 focus group immediately answered “in the private, at home” (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015). At the same time, another respondent said “in the privacy of their home” (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015). Upon hearing these responses, I probed as to why they chose to use the word “privacy”. To this question one respondent answered:

Because they don't want other people to actually see what they're doing. ... the norm in society is not to hit or abuse, when you actually do that it's an abnormal situation that's risen within the home and you don't want it to be known outside of the house. And I think most of the time you will see that when this event takes place you won't see the wife for a few days or they'll hit them in a place where it's covered. And if it's on the face ... you don't see the girl for a couple of days or weeks and then afterwards

you see a lot of make-up, more than [what she typically wears] (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

The women in the 19-35 focus group, answered in a slightly different manner. Unlike the representative from the Jamiat and the men in the 19-35 focus group, they took into account other forms of domestic violence and argued that emotional and psychological abuse could occur anywhere, both in the ‘private’ and ‘public’ realms. With regard to physical abuse the women had the same sentiments as the men and the representative from the Jamiat, they said that “if it’s physical, it definitely [takes place in] a house or somewhere where the public can’t see, behind closed doors” (Focus Group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015). Their views coincided with the men in the 35+ focus group who also argued that there are different types of violence, so the abuse can take place anywhere. However, “mental violence it could be ... public ... [and physical abuse takes place] at home” (Focus Group, Men 35+, 6 June 2015).

The above excerpts expose the critical view that violence is recognised as anathema, it was shameful. But at the same time, the right of men over their wives was also paradoxically accepted. First, the representative from the Jamiat, the men in the 19-35 focus group, the women in the 19-35 focus group and the men in the 35+ focus group, argued that physical abuse takes place in the “private”, the “home” or “where the public can’t see” and suggest a concern to hide the fact that there is such abuse. What it points to is the view that domestic violence is unacceptable and thus, as one of the informants said “you don’t want it to be known”. Yet there is evidence, too, that this secrecy is not always the case. Dangor (9 April 2015) mentioned an instance where physical abuse took place in the “public”. A woman was intercepted and beaten by her husband at the door of the counselling centre:

Years ago and this is not now, we had a situation where a man came to look for his wife here, she happened to be coming in for counselling and he beat her up right outside our door... (Interview, Dangor, 9 April 2015).

In contrast to the notion that domestic violence occurs in the private sphere, where no-one would be able to witness it, this example shows that the husband did not fear public reprimand for his actions. Thus the action exonerated his position as head of the family, with the right to hit his wife.

Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld (2005:5) explain that in South Africa due to the proximity of living spaces – apartments, houses, and in the informal settlements, shacks – “domestic violence is not a secret [and] [o]ften those in the survivor’s immediate environment are aware of the violence”. So whilst the abuse may take place “in the private” it does not necessarily mean that people are not privy to the abuse and do not know what is “going on” (Rasool-Bassadien and Hochfeld, 2005:5). Dangor’s views concur with this argument and she suggests that:

In places like Thembelihle, the informal settlement here, a lot more people know that the women are abused because of the dense population you don’t have the walls and the gates and the kind of security (Interview, Dangor, 9 April 2015).

Secondly, the comment about “shame” and “embarrassment” that was explicitly brought up by the representative from the Jamiat was raised by other participants as well. The women in both focus groups as well as Dangor mentioned how stigma and shame played a role in how both men and women dealt with the situation. The men in the 19-35 focus group alluded to the notion of shame by arguing that abusive relationships are “abnormal situations” and people would want to keep it quiet. The women in the 35+ focus group also discussed the stigma society attached to victims/survivors. A participant said:

I also think changing the stigma attached to being abused, when you start changing that, your forums will work a lot better as well. Because when you take the stigma away from ‘yes I’ve been abused’ either the man or woman ... you’re ok in speaking out about it ... especially in this country still, there’s such a stigma attached to it that the woman won’t say anything about it. Because ... if she goes out and she parts company with it, ‘which man is going to want me’ because I’ve been abused.

This participant went further, to suggest that once the stigma was replaced with recognition that survivors of violence needed support; they would then find it easier to seek such support. She said:

When you can take that stigma away you’ll actually start having your forums and your lifelines and your support centres to be able to do that. Also the people to help them – if you’ve got the people to help them [the right people], that know how to deal with it, it would be easier (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

As shown in the previous chapter, the Jamiat representative held views that were unexpectedly open-minded, especially given the fact that some respondents were critical of the Jamiat. The Jamiat representative argued that:

It [domestic violence] should be discussed openly. Perhaps there was a time when people used to, perhaps, you know, say leave it there, let them sort it out, don't make an issue of it, if you make an issue about it, it might end up in divorce ... and that would be a stigma upon women. I think society has evolved and moved away from that. I think most parents today, comparative to parents of yester year ... would perhaps bear physical abuse but would not bear the stigma of divorce. Today I think most parents would reject physical abuse even if it ends off in divorce (Interview, Jamiat, 24 March 2015).

The women in the 35+ focus group argued that more “forums” that touch on and speak to the available avenues of escape for women needed to be established to deal with the issue. Secondly, like participants in the other focus groups, these women and the Jamiat representative discussed the stigma attached to women who had been and continued to be abused. The embarrassment associated with being abused was paramount. However, unlike the women in the 35+ focus group, the Jamiat representative felt that society had “evolved” and that stigma was no longer attached to women who got divorced from an abusive partner. Dangor, like the women in the 35+ focus group suggested that the stigma attached to victims/survivors of domestic violence was not only a problem within the Muslim Indian community in Johannesburg. One can see examples of stigma attached to victims/survivors of domestic abuse in all cultures and societies. Dangor (9 April 2015) said: “it's in all communities, the secrecy thing, the issue around not ‘sharing your dirty laundry’. From what I've seen I think it's right across the board, it's not only with Muslim women” (Interview, Dangor, 9 April 2015).

It can be argued that this silence could be linked to “shame”. In this instance, the notion of shame could be two-fold: in the first instance, the perpetrator might feel ashamed if people found out, but the issue of whether he felt shame at his actions remains moot; in the second instance, the victim/survivor might feel shame for what happened and might also feel judged as if it is their fault that they were abused. The responses were not explicit about who would feel ashamed and embarrassed. Is it shameful and embarrassing behaviour for the perpetrator? Or is it shameful and embarrassing for the one who is being abused? What does

shame actually mean? This echoes some of the points argued by Bashir (2014:1) as discussed in the introduction. Bashir (2014:1) argues that a culture of “shame” generally blames victims/survivors as opposed to blaming the perpetrator.

A follow up question was asked to all participants, whether they thought domestic abuse is or should be a public matter, or should such issues be seen as a private matter, left in the home. The women in the 19-35 focus group focussed their response on counselling and receiving help. However, as to where one should seek help the women were divided. Two participants felt that the “parents from both sides” (Focus Group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015) should be informed about what was happening in an attempt to rectify the situation and assist in ending the abuse. Thus, this implied it was a private affair. In opposition to this argument, another participant argued that individuals should “go to a neutral party. Go for counselling or something. ... I just feel like once you open that can of worms to your family, can you ever see the person in the same way again?” (Focus Group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015). The participant was unclear about whether it would be difficult to “see” the perpetrator or the victim/survivor “in the same way”, or even both.

The men in the 19-35 focus group aimed their response on enlightening people as to the problem. They argued that it should be public, “[so] people know this is what’s happening and this is wrong ... it’ll lead to the ‘uneducated ones’ (I’m saying uneducated in the sense of the ones’ who do it) actually becoming educated and realising I shouldn’t be doing this, this is wrong [conscientising people]” (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015). The men in the 19-35 focus group were not the only ones who spoke about educating people. Dangor (9 April 2015) as well as the representatives from Islamic Careline (24 March 2015) also argued that education is a necessity. Dangor (9 April 2015) argued that education was not only needed by the general public, but for everyone in society, especially doctors, nurses and teachers. By way of explanation, she gave examples of how doctors often believed that the issue should remain a private matter:

For those women who have more security who are more affluent they don’t go to the clinics, they might go to their private doctor and just get medication. And that’s another thing, doctors themselves are patriarchal they’re not all supportive, there are those that are but not all of them are. So for example the doctor won’t say ‘ok tell me how did you get this blue eye, what happened’ and if you give him an excuse like I ran into the door, [they won’t say] really is that true, or was there something else

going on? They don't often do that ... they don't have to do it all but we don't have enough of that happening in this country. From the hospitals we're not screening people adequately to say maybe this may be a domestic violence case, let's check it out and see if the woman needs additional help. Sometimes if you just enquire a woman might open up and tell you because she's so desperate, she's so desperate to get out and afraid that she may be found out so you do need to be able to check out with her. It is a policy issue ... the thing about our policies are if you look at the DVA, you've got reasonably good policies where those things are concerned but we're battling to implement things (Interview, Dangor, 9 April 2015).

Dangor's (9 April 2015) arguments suggest that intervention needs to take place on a greater scale and individuals, especially doctors need to stop 'turning a blind eye'. If a doctor or nurse sees a suspicious injury on a patient they need to probe and try and get help for that patient. In addition, Dangor stresses that the issue does not lie solely in educating people and professionals about domestic violence, but that a major part of the problem is that as a country we are unable to implement the policies which are available. This is not a problem specific to South Africa. Douki et al. (2003:168) argues that "physicians also collude in this conspiracy. The lack of abuse detection by health professionals is alarming". Douki et al. (2003) further argues that:

The indifference to this type of violence stems from attitudes that domestic violence is a private matter and, usually, a justifiable response to misbehaviour on the part of the wife. Selective excerpts from the [Qur'an] are used to prove that men who beat their wives are following God's commandments. These religious justifications, plus the importance of preserving the honour of the family, lead abusers, victims, police and health care professionals to join in a conspiracy of silence rather than disclosing these offences." (Douki et al., 2003:165).

These quotes show that on an international level, health care professionals especially need to take a keen interest in the well-being of their patients. In addition, it depicts that 'protecting and preserving family honour' is at the heart of the silence around domestic abuse. A representative from Islamic Careline argued that:

We should be talking about it ... People's individual experiences on a counselling level are taken serious as that is a private matter. If the person who is experiencing the domestic abuses wants to make it public then it is entirely up to them to do so but from a counselling perspective we do not reveal a person's intimate details. But on a broader level we have to talk about domestic violence, educating people about it. Teaching people about it, creating awareness around it so that people know it exists.

And we are seeing a difference we see that people are coming to us and letting us know what it is they are experiencing. Especially when we are talking about emotional abuse and women are able to recognise it in the early stages by talking about it. We are making people more aware and thus reaching out in a societal level (Interview, Islamic Careline, 24 March 2015).

The men in the 35+ focus group felt that domestic violence should be spoken about. However, there was one participant whose initial response was that such issues should be left “at home”. Upon hearing the initial remarks made by the other participants he opted to listen and not elaborate. The other participants continued by arguing that domestic abuse should be revealed especially if it occurs on more than one occasion as speaking about the issue will enable one to deal with it. A participant added:

Some people show off when they do wrong. You see there’s two types of people, you see if I abuse my wife today ... maybe I’ll never do it again, I’ll feel remorse. Maybe after the second or third time, then she needs to go and tell someone that, you know, what my husband is abusing me, it’s not right. Because then I’m a chicken, because I can abuse a woman that’s weaker than me, but I can’t abuse [a man] because he’s stronger than me. So I think after maybe the third time go and speak to somebody about it, don’t cover it. (Focus Group, Men 35+, 6 June 2015).

Upon hearing this response the participant whose initial reaction was ‘to leave such issues in the home’ said “that’s what I wanted to say” (Focus Group, Men 35+, 6 June 2015). There are two issues that were taken into consideration when hearing this. First, it could be that this participant felt outnumbered as he was the only one who said domestic abuse should be left in the home and it should not be a public matter. Very often the first words uttered by an individual are usually their most honest feelings and opinions. However, on the other hand, it could be that because the men spoke almost immediately after him, this participant was unable to elaborate what he actually meant. At the end of the conversation regarding this question the participant said the following:

Before it becomes public ... try and resolve it, if they fail in that venture then they must go out and look for a different resource or form to try and sort the abuse (Focus Group, Men 35+, 6 June 2015).

The men also argued that it was vital for perpetrators to be exposed as some individuals treat strangers and people outside of their immediate family with more respect, love and

dignity than their own. One participant spoke of multiple forms of abuse – taking a wife for granted, controlling women’s mobility, economic and emotional dominance. He explained:

Another form of abuse that I find is what [people] ... do is if you have a wife and children, you don’t give them the time and the effort, you don’t assist them, in the form of, say for example a long weekend comes, you take your fishing rod and you gone for the weekend, the wife sits there she doesn’t have family, that’s also a form of abuse. You tell her don’t go by your parents’ house because you want to go spend time there, or you’ll take all of my money and go give it to them, it creates a problem. And another form of abuse is because you’re the dominant figure you bring money into the house ... you can do what you want; the wife sees that abuse that you are doing. You know for example if you’re Muslim you’ll go drink, you’ll go have affairs with other women, and you tell me if you open your mouth I’m going to divorce you, now this woman is shit scared, she has children, she knows she doesn’t have a family that will look after her and that also is another form of abuse. ... So there’s various forms of abuse, some of them can be triggered by the spouse themselves (Focus Group, Men 35+, 6 June 2015).

While men’s behaviour was acknowledged as abusive and neglect was recognised as abuse, wives were also seen to trigger abuse. This was not the first time a participant suggested that men in particular are sometimes provoked by their wives. As discussed in the previous chapter, a participant in the women 35+ focus group argued the same thing. Society needs to move away from looking for reasons as to why perpetrators abuse by blaming victims/survivors. The victim/survivor is never at fault, only the perpetrator is. Upon hearing this I enquired whether or not domestic violence is justifiable, to which all of the participants said no. As one participant put it: “it’s abuse you can’t say abuse is justified in any form” (Focus Group, Men 35+, 6 June 2015). In their work Douki et al. (2003:167) discuss their findings from their research conducted in Arab and Islamic countries. Their findings suggest that “60% of men and 50% of women strongly agreed or agreed that a violent husband is not solely responsible for his behaviour” (Douki et al., 2003:167). Thus, ideas of victim blaming are prevalent in a global context as well.

The women in the 35+ focus group argued that domestic violence should be a public matter and spoken about. One participant argued that it should be confined to the extended family so that they may intervene and assist. She further suggested that making the issue a public one would give the abuser unnecessary attention. Especially if the abuser had a narcissistic personality, he would thrive on the attention and continue with the abuse. She

said “as soon as you take it public, you run the risk of giving the abuser more attention and he will do whatever he wants to get more attention” (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

A key issue for many of the women in this focus group was the pertinence of having a good infrastructure and avenues of escape that would give women the confidence to seek the help they need. One of the participants said:

I think there should be more forums created ... more support groups. I personally feel as a community we should create more support groups where people can find help and it should be dealt with in the highest confidentiality. I think that if that is what's created we'll get more statistics out of it, people will realise that there is a problem as such and hopefully the men that are abusing, or women that are abusing also come to realise that you know what there's a forum we can go out and speak on, there's a platform that we can do this on (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

6.2. Avenues of Escape:

As discussed above, the women in the 35+ focus group argued that the avenues of escape available for women are limited and in some instances non-existent. A very passionate respondent argued:

Taking the circumstances, where does the woman go to? Where? Is there a forum; is there any institute that will house the person, the woman? So I think in our community and as Muslims we don't care about a widow [for example] we don't have any facility for this type of abuse so where does a woman go to? She has to submit and live under that circumstance. If there is [a shelter or forum] it's not [being advertised]... as a Muslim community we should be posting these types of information on our Mosque boards, we should be having it in our Madressas. God forbid if something happens to one of us we won't know what to do. So what we're going to do is close the doors, say shush, let's live and carry on. The other thing is the stigma that goes with it because in our community these things are happening but we are all living, pushing all of this under the rug, we are living with this kind of situation. Firstly, I totally say we don't have any avenue to run to, we don't have. And yes I know there is shelters in other cultures but as Muslims we have nothing ... it's happening, we're not admitting it. ... right now the men are having more power ... he can do what he wants to do to this woman because there's no one to help her (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

The other respondents agreed with the sentiments of this respondent. Another respondent suggested that:

It's the accountability that isn't in place, if our institutions were there to be accountable [to] ... but [also] just to know [that] I can walk out on you at any time; that will stop his hand. If she [is able] to say I'm not dependent on you. ... The abuse goes on when there's no sense of accountability. ... If you can turn it around and ... you're able to turn the tables then you might have them stop, but we are not empowered, the infrastructure is not there to help us (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

However, two respondents seemed more optimistic about the next generation arguing that because people in their daughters' age group were educated and "empowered" they would be more able to leave such situations should they find themselves in them. This is what one of them said:

A lot of the divorce happening in our society because now our daughters are empowered, we giving them an education, they won't put up with it (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

Another participant added:

I think we are getting there, that is why you [don't] find the youth of today taking all this type of abuse, that is why we are sitting with so many home-breakings, because they're not going to take that type of abuse ... I mean in the past it would've happened, it would've been all shushed ... but right now I don't think the youth with the knowledge they've gained they will because no man is allowed to lift his hand (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

The excerpts above point first to a lack of support and places of safety. For the women in the 35+ focus group, avenues of escape are limited and if they are available they are not advertised in places accessible to women. Secondly, they comment on the generational differences and how women of their generation would handle this situation as opposed to how women in their children's generation would. The women in the 35+ focus group were not the only ones to point to the generational difference. A participant from the men 19-35 focus group argued that:

The older generation were brought up with that mind-set of ‘no just go, forgive him’, ‘make it work’, ‘it will work’ – those are the arguments that are thrown out and then the girls go back and then [another participant interjects saying they’re kind of forced to] the man says oh I did that to her and she came back. It grows, it’s a feed back in, so then next time it happens, it’s going to be worse, and it’s going to be worse. He’ll think that she’s always going to come back (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

The men in this focus group as well as the women in the 19-35 focus group like the women in the 35+ focus group concurred that a woman’s education, a supportive family structure and whether or not she was earning her own income contributed to how she would handle the situation. A participant argued that:

It could be a general thing to say that women without a solid family structure are more prone to domestic violence but they would feel such a dependence on their husbands that they would accept what he says ... or does as the final word. For example a woman relies only on her husband and she has no assets to her name, I mean human nature would tell you to stick in it you know, don’t drop this or you’re going to lose the house (Focus Group, Men 19-35, 23 May 2015).

A participant from the women 19-35 focus group said:

Anybody who has been in love for example, if somebody does something to you and asks forgiveness, you forgive them because you feel affection to them. And that can be manipulated to a greater degree and you can do it for years and a lot of women with kids are like, where will we go, what do I have and they are so again battered from the inside that they think little of themselves, so you think I will not be able to start a career. How am I going to support my kids? All those things people take into consideration (Focus Group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015).

For most participants education did not simply mean schooling but also to socialisation and the tools parents equip their children with to fight everyday problems. The women in the 19-35 focus group discussed the importance of raising confident children who know their worth. They also spoke about the importance of schools and *Madressa*’s discussing societal issues. A participant put it this way:

Instilling confidence in your children also and self-esteem and what they think of themselves. I think that’s your foundation and if you get that right... you don’t have to be an extreme feminist and you don’t have to be somebody who’s going to take the abuse either, you can actually start thinking for yourself. ... When we speak about

avenues [of escape] like support stuff and those kinds of things ... [but also in] Madressa ... like we learn certain [books], we learn something but nothing is topical, nothing ever changes, nothing is related to issues in society. Why not bring that up in those kinds of places, where we are told about the world, where we can take a lot more information and then it generally goes home (Focus Group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015).

These comments depict the limited and sometimes non-existent avenues of escape available to victims/survivors of domestic abuse. The men in the 19-35 focus group acknowledged that even if there were institutions willing to help victims/survivors it did not necessarily mean that women would go to these places for help. This is another instance of how stigma and shame are contributing factors to how victims/survivors would deal with domestic abuse. When discussing domestic violence in a cultural context Tripp and Affi (2004:34-35) argue that:

Women may not seek help as this implies failure as a wife, mother, or woman. Reporting an abusive spouse to the authorities may be seen as bringing shame on the woman, her family, and her community. In many countries, divorce is viewed as a greater evil than domestic violence. Families may blame the woman for ending the marriage, even though she was a victim of IPV. They may shun her or prevent her from remarrying. Thus, families and communities may encourage women to remain in abusive marriages.

These arguments were enunciated by the women in the 19-35 focus group as well. The women argued that women might feel embarrassed and maybe even afraid to report the abuse (Focus Group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015). A participant in this focus group criticised the institution of marriage and the emphasis society places on it. She argued that:

I think some people put such a high emphasis on marriage like it's the 'be all and end all' of a woman that once they get married they will do anything to make it work even if it means keeping quiet and allowing your husband to beat you or abuse you (Focus Group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015).

The women in this focus group also discussed the extent to which domestic abuse affects a woman's psychological well-being. They argued that women in such situations are sometimes so manipulated that they rationalise the abuse, and in some instances even justify it by thinking their actions warranted the abuse. As one woman expressed it:

There are a lot of women who say it was my fault. I made him do it. ... Abuse often doesn't come alone and not always but sometimes the guy can be exceptionally maligned nature and the personality is so sociopathic that even though you are a strong person you end up feeling you are responsible because of that unhealthy relationship (Focus Group, Women 19-35, 17 May 2015)

Tripp and Affi (2004:34) explain that:

Women also may not seek help as they try to rationalise their husbands' behaviour as part of the cultural environment in which they grew up, where domestic violence was virtually institutionalised and accepted as part of life for both men and women. They may have grown up with violence and seen it replicated generation after generation to the point that it becomes 'normalised'.

As argued in the literature review and the previous chapter, the men in the 19-35 focus group spoke about the cycle of violence that is reproduced within families – if violence is a means of settling disagreements, then violence will be part of the repertoire for those individuals to resort to it. So while education may provide knowledge about domestic violence, to act on the view that it is 'unnatural' and 'abhorrent' might require more than education, but transformative work. In an interview with a representative from the South African Police Service (SAPS), he urged victims to always seek help and go to the police station. He said:

Victims of any type of violence should seek help always. They can be assisted by various trauma and counselling centres around the country, so registered social workers, psychologists or family and friends. Victims of domestic violence should always report any incident of domestic violence to the police so it can be investigated and recorded, also the police are duty bound to assist the victim getting the necessary help regardless of whether the victim would like to lay a criminal charge against the perpetrator or not. The main reason is that the police will arrive at the scene of a domestic violence incident and ensure that it does not escalate and that the victims are taken to safety (Interview, SAPS, 20 April 2015).

Whilst, the comments made by the SAPS representative seem assuring, the arguments and sentiments of the respondents shows a juxtaposition between the police and general members of the public. As discussed earlier in the chapter Dangor (9 April 2015) argued that indeed the policies are sound, yet the implementation is where the problem lies. To further show that the implementation of policies is problematic and that going to the police is not necessarily

an avenue that will save a life, a survivor of domestic abuse shared her experience. This respondent from the women 35+ focus group was the only one who knew about the DVA. She was able to explain the Act, and the process that she went through in trying to attain a Protection Order. She explained:

You go to Family Court, you fill in a form, once you fill in the form they issue you with a piece of paper – the person who's being abused has to go serve on the abuser with the police. You've got to find them ... and you've got to hand it to the person themselves. So me as the victim I've got to take a document and go give it to a man that's abusing me (your mind loses it). Then you wait a month or so for a court hearing where the person's allowed to give evidence against you, [he] is going to prove you wrong in court and you have to stand and give evidence. And then he's got to cross question you and then they can postpone that like 6 or 7 times and that can take like 6 months. If you have an attorney present you've got to pay for the attorney's cost for every single appearance. I'm trying to get a restraining order; I've been hassling since November [November 2014]. I know it was a lot easier 15 years ago to get one, but today it just takes too long, our legal system is way too slow (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015).

Upon hearing this first-hand account, the other women were completely appalled by the process and how long it takes. They argued for the need for a faster process that would be able to assist the abused. A respondent said “the whole procedure by the time [it's over] I think the poor woman is beaten to the pulp” (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015). To this another respondent replied by saying “absolutely it's way too long and by the time the Protection Order comes through ... she'll be six feet under” (Focus Group, Women 35+, 15 May 2015). This discussion does not only depict the lack of avenues of escape available to women but also depicts the slow process of the law. Policy and policy implementation need to work hand in hand in order for society to function in the best possible manner. The current lack of policy implementation is detrimental to all victims/survivors – as discussed in the beginning of the research report a woman in South Africa is killed every six hours by the hands of her partner.

In conclusion, an interrogation of the boundaries between the public and private realms was important to investigate as the participants varied in how they thought domestic violence should be dealt with. Some argued that individuals should go to a neutral party, whilst others suggested informing immediate family members would be better. If these processes did not resolve their differences, then if a woman had the means to leave her husband she should do

so, even if this means divorcing him. However, unlike the women respondents and the men in the 19-35 focus group, the older men did not discuss the existence or otherwise of avenues of escape. The women including Zubeda Dangor suggested that policy implementation was poor, and that it should be improved in order to protect women. The public and private distinction forced the respondents to interrogate where they thought domestic violence takes place. The respondents argued that physical violence took place in “the privacy of the home”, whereas emotional and psychological abuse could take place anywhere. The participants however, did not account for the fact that in South Africa class and culture meant that the notion of public and private varies widely. Houses include both nuclear families as well as extended families. Awareness of abuse thus varies as well. The idea of honour, shame and embarrassment was implicit in the various approaches held by different respondents. So for some, the idea that abused women should ‘go to a family member to sort the issue out’ shows that privacy and family honour are key factors in resolving issues of abuse against women. Honour, the patriarchal idea, that the family would be shamed by any public exposure of shameful private behaviour, is in the final analysis, a key factor for all the informants. Despite the abuse of rights that domestic violence implies, the honour of the family must be protected.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This research report began with a discussion of an article written by Ruzwana Bashir (2014) in which she argued that domestic violence is associated with honour and shame in Muslim culture. This made it virtually impossible for women to report abuse. When they did, they suffered double jeopardy. This argument formed the basis for the questions and rationale for my own study, to find out how members of the Muslim community in Johannesburg perceived domestic violence. The research investigated the views of a small but diverse group of Muslims, including men and women of different ages, on the issue. An important reason for undertaking this research was, apart from making a contribution to the literature, to encourage greater openness and a willingness to discuss this topic in Muslim communities.

The research report attempted to address two key themes through the research. The first, involved a textual analysis of the interpretations of Chapter 4 Verse 34 in the Qur'an. The second theme, addressed how different cohorts related to the issue of violence against women. The interpretations of Verse 34 Chapter 4 in the Qur'an and of Islam became the basis for how members of the Muslim congregations, whom I interviewed, understood and defined gendered violence. Their reference was invariably Verse 34, Chapter 4 (N.J. Dawood 1956). The second theme, which was the main focus of the research, attempted to untangle how the different cohorts viewed domestic violence, not only in Islam, but in their communities.

The respondents argued that whilst domestic violence is a general social problem, it occurs in Muslim homes to a lesser extent. These comments showed an element of denial and even naivety on the part of the respondents. They argued that both religion and culture proscribed and prohibited domestic violence. Their evidence resided in the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the person he was in order to show that domestic violence was not allowed in Islam. However, both older men and women indirectly and directly blamed women for the abuse to which they were subjected. They used examples of a 'wife who does not behave or dress accordingly' and a 'nagging wife' to give reasons and justify women abuse. This victim-blaming resides within a strongly patriarchal bias that inevitably justifies domestic violence. Only one respondent actually challenged this perspective in asking whether the differentiation of gender roles in the family is not an example of exploitation and abuse.

Overall the respondents understood and knew about various forms of domestic violence – pointing to emotional, psychological and physical abuse as reflected in existing legislation. However, none of the participants mentioned economic abuse as a form of domestic violence. This is important because in Muslim culture, women are seen as the ‘head of the home’, yet are economically dependent on male members of their family – fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons.

When discussing the politics surrounding the notion of privacy and security the discussion was intertwined within a greater discourse of the public and private debate. Hegemonic discourse in society has differentiated between what belongs in the private sphere and what can be made public. Within Muslim culture, the private is equated with honour – so making public what should be private is perceived as a breach of that honour. There is a conundrum at the heart of this conception, as most respondents, especially the women, believed that there should be mechanisms of support for abused women and avenues of escape from the abuse. Yet the older women especially held onto the notion of honour and shame. The younger women were more prepared to jettison the idea.

7.1. Recommendations:

From the empirical research point of view, throughout the research report the respondents were critical of the Jamiat and the manner in which they handled pertinent issues such as domestic violence as well as other issues facing the youth (such as sex before marriage and drug and alcohol abuse). The Jamiat has the platform to make a difference in the community but it is clear from the research that the community does not have faith in them. Thus, the Jamiat has the responsibility and task of instilling confidence in the Muslim community in Johannesburg. Trust in the Jamiat would allow individuals to seek their assistance and guidance – two facets the Jamiat prides themselves on.

Secondly, state institutions need to be held accountable with regards to policy implementation. It needs to be mandatory for doctors and nurses to probe and give assistance to individuals whom they think are victims of domestic violence. Doctors should be allowed to open cases at police stations even if the victim ‘claims to not want the assistance’. Police have the duty to follow up each incidence of domestic violence. Society needs to move away

from viewing domestic violence as solely a 'private matter'. Thus, education and socialisation need to be addressed with both the young and older generations. Individuals need to be taught about domestic violence, what it constitutes and how to deal with it. As commented on in the literature review marital rape was not discussed, but issues of consent and respect for human beings need to be addressed at a societal level as well. Only then will policies, services and facilities be able to work together in an attempt to curb and eventually end domestic violence.

Lastly, state institutions along with non-governmental organisations or non-profit organisations need to work together to create more and better avenues of escape for women. These avenues need to be properly advertised on television, the radio, billboards, in newspapers, magazines and at places women frequent. Society needs to be inundated with information about gender based violence, and specifically violence against women, so that perpetrators are aware that there will be repercussions for their actions. In addition, organisations that already exist such as NISAA, POWA and the Teddy Bear Clinic need to work on making their organisations more visible.

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