

Muslim Clerics on the Religious Rulings Regarding Wife-Beating
By Steven Stalinsky & Y. Yehoshua*.

Introduction

On January 14, 2004, Sheikh Muhammad Kamal Mustafa, the imam of the mosque of the city of Fuengirola, Costa del Sol, was sentenced by a Barcelona court to a 15 month suspended sentence and fined € 2160 for publishing his book 'The Woman in Islam.' In this book, the Egyptian-born Sheikh Mustafa writes, among other things, on wife-beating in accordance with Shar'ia law.

On pages 86-87, Mustafa states: "The [wife-]beating must never be in exaggerated, blind anger, in order to avoid serious harm [to the woman]." He adds, "It is forbidden to beat her on the sensitive parts of her body, such as the face, breast, abdomen, and head. Instead, she should be beaten on the arms and legs," using a "rod that must not be stiff, but slim and lightweight so that no wounds, scars, or bruises are caused." Similarly, "[the blows] must not be hard." [1]

Mustafa noted in his book that the aim of the beating was to cause the woman to feel some emotional pain, without humiliating her or harming her physically. According to him, wife-beating must be the last resort to which the husband turns in punishing his wife, and is, according to the Qur'an, Chapter 4, Verse 34, the husband's third step when the wife is rebellious: First, he must reprimand her, without anger. Next, he must distance her from the conjugal bed. Only if these two methods fail should the husband turn to beating.

In his verdict, the judge said that Sheikh Mustafa's book contained incitement to violence against women, that today's society is completely different from society 1400 years ago, and that the sections of the book in which the sheikh wrote of wife-beating constitute a violation of the penal code and of women's constitutional rights. In his defense, Sheikh Mustafa's attorney argued that his client was not expressing his personal opinion, but only reiterating the writings of Islam from the 13th and 19th centuries. [2]

The book, which sold around 3,000 copies in Islamic cultural centers across Spain, was removed from the shelves. [3]

The following report will review the writings and statements of Muslim clerics and of other Islamic religious institutions that instead of condemning wife-beating, discuss it as a legitimate way of "disciplining" the wife, based on the Qur'an (4:34).

Sheikh Yousef Qaradhawi: 'It is Permissible For The Husband to Beat Her Lightly'

Sheikh Yousef Qaradhawi, one of the most influential clerics in Sunni Islam and head of the **European Council for Fatwa and Research**, has advocated non-painful wife-beating.

In his 1984 book '*The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*,' he wrote:

"Because of his natural ability and his responsibility for providing for his family, the man is the head of the house and of the family. He is entitled to the obedience and cooperation of his wife, and accordingly it is not permissible for her to rebel against his authority, causing disruption. Without a captain the ship of the household will flounder and sink.

"If the husband senses that feelings of disobedience and rebelliousness are rising against him in his wife, he should try his best to rectify her attitude by kind words, gentle persuasion, and reasoning with her. If this is not helpful, he should sleep apart from her, trying to awaken her agreeable feminine nature so that serenity may be restored, and she may respond to him in a harmonious fashion. If this approach fails, it is permissible for him to beat her lightly with his hands, avoiding her face and other sensitive parts. In no case should he resort to using a stick or any other instrument that might cause pain and injury. Rather, this 'beating' should be of the kind which the Prophet (peace be on him) once, when angry with his servant, mentioned to him, saying, 'If it were not for the fear of retaliation on the Day of Resurrection, I would have beaten you with this *miswak* (tooth-cleaning stick)' [as reported by Ibn Majah and by Ibn Hibban, in his *Sahih*].

"The Prophet (pbuh) admonished men concerning beating their wives, saying 'None of you must beat his wife as a slave is beaten and then have intercourse with her at the end of the day.'

"It was reported to the Prophet (pbuh) that some of his Companions beat their wives, whereupon he said, 'Certainly those are not the best among you [as reported by Ahmad, Abu Daoud, and al-Nisai. Ibn Hibban and Al-Hakim classify it as sound, as narrated by Iyas ibn 'Abdullah ibn Abu Dhiab].'

"Says Imam Al-Hafiz ibn Hajar, 'The saying of the Prophet (pbuh), 'The best among you do not beat,' could imply that beating wives is in general permissible. To be specific, one may beat only to safeguard Islamic behavior and if he (the husband) sees deviation only in what she must do or obey in relation to him. It is preferable to warn (her) or something of the sort, and as long as it is possible to achieve things through warning, any use of force is disallowed because force generates hatred, which is inimical to the harmony expected in marriage. Force is applied only when sin against Allah Ta'alah (*masiyah*) is feared. Al-Nasai has reported 'Aishah as saying, 'The Prophet (pbuh) never beat any of his wives or servants; in fact, he did not strike anything with his hand except in the cause of Allah or when the prohibitions of Allah were violated, and he retaliated on behalf of Allah.'

"If all these approaches fail, and the rift between the husband and wife deepens, the matter then devolves on the Islamic society for solution. Two individuals of good will and sound judgment, one from the wife's and one from the husband's side, should meet with the couple in order to try to resolve their differences. Perhaps the sincerity of their efforts may bear fruit and Allah may bring about reconciliation between the spouses." [\[4\]](#)

On the *Al-Jazeera* weekly program 'The Shar'ia and Life' of October 5, 1997, Al-Qaradhawisaid: "Beating is permitted [to the man] in the most limited of cases, and only in a case when the wife rebels against her husband... The beating, of course, will not be with a whip, a stick, or a board. The beating will be according to what the Prophet said to a servant girl who annoyed him on a particular matter, 'If it were not for fear of punishment in the Hereafter, I would have beaten you with this *miswak*.'

"Likewise, the beating must come only after admonishment, and expelling [the wife] from the bed [as is said in the Qur'an 4:34], 'Admonish them, leave them alone in their beds, and beat them.'

He also said: "Beating is not suitable for every wife; it is suitable for certain wives and for other wives it is not. There is a woman who cannot agree to being beaten, and sees this as humiliation, while some women enjoy the beating and for them, only beating to cause them sorrow is suitable..."

"The Prophet said about those who beat their wives: 'Those are not the best among you.' The respectable and honest Muslim man does not beat his wife, and his hand is not accustomed to beating. If [the husband] beats [his wife] he must beat her in the way of which we spoke. He must refrain from beating her in sensitive places or on her face." [5]

In a *Fatwa* posted on www.islamonline.net, Qaradhawi said on the same matter: "It is forbidden to beat the woman, unless it is necessary, and she 'is in a state of rebellion' against the husband and flouts him. This is temporary discipline [*ta'adib*] that is permitted to him according to the Qur'an in exceptional circumstances, when other efforts of admonishing [the wife] have failed and removing her from the bed as Allah said: 'As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them pretexts (for annoyance): for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all).'[Qur'an 4:34] Despite this permission for the hour of necessity, the Prophet said: 'The good men from among you do not beat [their wives].'" [6]

Islamic Affairs Department of Saudi Arabia's Washington, DC Embassy: Men Have a Supervisory Authority because of Their Physical Advantages

According to the website of the embassy of Saudi Arabia's [7] Islamic Affairs Department (IAD), [8] wife-beating is permitted in accordance with Qur'anic verses and *Hadiths* used by the IAD to explain the rights a husband has over his wives: [9] "The husband's rights on his wife are greater than hers over him." Another source states, "Men have a supervisory authority on account of the physical advantage they possess..." [10] It is also stated, "When the husband calls his wife to his bed and she disobeys, and he spends the night in anger against her, the angels keep cursing her till the morning." [11] In addition, "If a woman dies while her husband was pleased with her," it is explained that "she will enter into Paradise." [12]

The IAD explains that the Qur'an [13] authorizes a husband to beat his "disobedient wife." Like many sources in modern Islamic history, the IAD tries – by basing its interpretation on *Hadith* – to explain this authority as limited in circumstances as well as in harshness (i.e. limited to use of small, non-harmful methods, such as beating with a toothpick). [14]

If a woman does not follow authority, the IAD explains at what point men are allowed to discipline her: "The maximum disciplining measure is limited by the following: a) It must be seen as a rare exception to the repeated exhortation of mutual respect, kindness and good treatment. Based on the Qur'an and *Hadith*, this disciplining measure may be used in the case of lewdness on the part of the wife or extreme refractoriness and rejection of the husband's reasonable requests on a consistent basis. Even then other measures such as exhortation should be tried first. b) As defined by the *Hadith*, it is not permissible to strike anyone's face, cause any bodily harm or even be harsh. What the *Hadith* qualified as *dharban ghayra mubarrih*, or light beating, was interpreted by early jurists as a (symbolical) use of the *miswak*." [15]

Prominent Muslim-American Leader: 'Beating Does Not Mean Physical Abuse'

Answering the question: "Does Islam allow wife-beating?" **Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi, former president of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)** stated: "It is important that a wife recognizes the authority of her husband in the house. He is the head of the household, and she is supposed to listen to him. But the husband should also use his authority with respect and kindness towards his wife. If there arises any disagreement or dispute among them, then it should be resolved in a peaceful manner. Spouses should seek the counsel of their elders and other respectable family members and friends to patch up the rift and solve the differences.

"However, in some cases a husband may use some light disciplinary action in order to correct the moral infraction of his wife, but this is only applicable in extreme cases and it should be resorted to if one is sure it would improve the situation. However, if there is a fear that it might worsen the relationship or may wreak havoc on him or the family, then he should avoid it completely."

According to Siddiqi, "The Qur'an is very clear on this issue. Almighty Allah says: ' 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 to guard. As to those women on whose part you 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 and Great (above you all). If you fear a breach between them twain, appoint (two) arbiters, one from his family and the other from hers. If they wish for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation; for Allah has full knowledge and is acquainted with all things. (4:34-35)'

"It is important to read the section fully. One should not take part of the verse and use it to justify one's own misconduct. This verse neither permits violence nor condones it. It guides us to ways to handle [a] delicate family situation with care and wisdom. The word 'beating' is used in the verse, but it does not mean 'physical abuse.' The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) explained it '*dharban ghayra mubarrih*,' which means 'a light tap that leaves no mark.' He further said that [the] face must be avoided. Some other scholars are of the view that it is no more than a light touch by siwak, or toothbrush."

Siddiqi cites a *Hadith* to use caution when beating one's wife: "Generally, the Prophet (pbuh) used to discourage his followers from taking even this measure. He never hit any female, and he used to say that the best of men are those who do not hit their wives. In one *Hadith* he expressed his extreme repulsion from this behavior and said, 'How does anyone of you beat his wife as he beats the stallion camel and then embrace (sleep with) her?' (Al-Bukhari, English Translation, vol. 8, *Hadith* 68, pp. 42-43)"

Siddiqi adds: "It is also important to note that even this 'light strike' mentioned in the verse is not to be used to correct some minor problem, but it is permissible to resort to only in a situation of some serious moral misconduct when admonishing the wife fails, and avoiding from sleeping with her would not help. If this disciplinary action can correct a situation and save the marriage, then one should use it." [16]

Saudi TV Show: Disciplining Wives and Children

Jasem Muhammad Al-Mutawah, an expert on family matters in Islam, hosts a show on **Saudi Arabia's *Iqraa TV***. [17] In one episode, Al-Mutawa discussed wife-beating while holding a 10-foot pool cue which he said some couples keep in the home. The following are excerpts of one episode; to view in RealPlayer visit:

http://stream.realimpact.net/rihurl_ram?file=realimpact/memri/memri_10-30-02_08.rm

Al-Mutawah opened the show by explaining: "Imposing discipline within the family is the right of the husband towards his wife, as it is the right of the wife towards the husband. As has always been our custom, on every program we present stories from the home of the Prophet Muhammad and how these stories serve the topic of our program. All the Prophet Muhammad's wives united against him on the matter of meeting their material needs because they had asked for more money, and demanded to live a life of luxury, but the Prophet told them: 'I cannot; this is my material level and this is what I am capable of giving.' On this point the Prophet was resolute, but they insisted on receiving a raise.

"The Prophet, to discipline them, banished them (from his bed) for 30 days until 'Omar Ibn Al-Khattab intervened, to present to the Prophet the wives' desires. But the Prophet was insistent, and then 'Omar Ibn Al-Khattab said to the Prophet: 'Your wives have relinquished their demand'... How did the Prophet handle the matter? With wisdom and calmness. The Prophet did not handle the matter with a rod. We have a proverb that says what? The proverb says: The rod... Ah? The rod for whom? 'The rod is for the disobedient.' What do you think, is it true or not? This is a small rod. I want to take now

the large rod... this is not even a rod... Look at this rod with me, look... look... Some husbands and wives keep such rods at home."

Al-Mutawah explains when using the rod is allowed and also on what types of wood they are made from: "I once heard someone say that whenever he has a problem at home he has a very long rod like this. The moment my wife makes a mistake towards me, what I do to her with this rod... We say, then, that the proverb, 'The rod is for the disobedient' is, in truth, a perception that is wrong. On the contrary: The rod destroys our life and our homes. We should solve our problems with dialogue, in truth, we must solve our problems, with mutual understanding because we are human, civilized people. Therefore, every problem in marriage, or every educational problem, we encounter we handle with mutual understanding... The Qur'an states: First of all guidance, advice, and admonition; then, banishment from the bed, and then 'beat them.' When the Qur'an presented this verse, it did not present it for all cases, but for one case out of all ways of female behavior – the case of disobedience. Let's assume that one man, his wife made a mistake, then he comes and says to her: 'I implement the Qur'an on you – advice, banishment, and beatings.' No, brothers, no, sisters... this is a misunderstanding of the religion. So, how should we deal with the other party when they behave with obstinacy and arrogance? How will we impose discipline and change the behavior?"

"There is a wife with whom using hard words is useful, and there is a wife with whom it is not. There is a wife with whom using quiet, good words is useful, in contrast, there is a wife with whom if you use hard words her obstinacy will only increase, and thus the problem will get worse. In contrast, there is a wife with whom the situation is the opposite: If you use calm words with her, she will not grasp them, and the problem will continue... We all know that Allah has given authority to the man, including admonishing and guiding the wife in cases of disobedience, banishing her from the bed, and then – the beatings. What is your opinion on the matter?..."

Dr. Muhammad Al-Hajj, lecturer on Islamic faith at the University of Jordan (Amman) was a guest on the show. His opening statement discussed disciplining one's wife: "We in Islam see the family as an institution, an institution that must succeed. This institution has foundations, and it has the elements for its success. Allah gave the management of this institution to the man. This is the concept of guardianship. Guardianship in Islam does not mean repression, concerning which there are penal and moral laws. The issue is who directs this institution, because two people cannot drive a car – there must be one driver. Islam has given the wheel of this car, the car of the family, to the man. The verse discussing the handling of problems that may crop up in the family is included in the passage discussing guardianship: 'Men are the guardians of women,' and then Allah says, 'Admonish those of them on whose part you fear disobedience, and banish them from the beds, and beat them. Then, if they obey you, do not seek a pretext to hurt them.' The order that appears in this verse is a wise order. It is not possible to move to the second stage before the first stage, or to the third stage before the second. The wonderful thing in this verse is that it mentioned this solution for the case of disobedience."

The following are excerpts from the episode:

Guest: "We are not talking about a man imposing discipline every day, asking any little thing of her, and she refuses, and then he banishes her or beats her. Such a thing does not exist in Islam at all."

Host: "All right, doctor, what does 'disobedience' mean?"

Guest: "Yes, Allah said, 'Those on whose part you fear disobedience.' Disobedience is defiance, rebellion, doing deplorable and ugly things about which there is a consensus among the people that they are deplorable. Therefore, not every little transgression at home, such as, she cooked something he didn't want, is considered disobedience. This is not disobedience. Punishment is limited to cases of disobedience, and for instances of making this family into hell, and into an unnatural situation. Then, in order to handle this problem, in the case of the wife's disobedience and rebellion – there must be a cure for such instances – to this end, there is this progression. First, the moment there is fear of disobedience, and even before the disobedience itself happens, comes the stage of admonition: admonition by mentioning Allah, mentioning the rights of the couple, mentioning the continuation of the family and the children's future..."

Host: "And the admonition continues for a long time, not a day or two..."

Guest: "No, no. Obviously, the admonition cannot end in a day or two. It must continue for a significant period, during which all means of persuasion are exhausted."

Host: "The admonition must be done with words, or the [husband] can use a cassette, a video film, a book, a meeting, a course, a magazine..."

Guest: "All these means are included in the method of admonition, which can include also enticements through money or gifts..."

Host: "He can get her an Internet program, so she will learn..."

Guest: "He can remind her of matters concerning this world and the world to come. All these are included in this admonition. And if this wife continues in her rebelliousness..."

Host: "After a long time..."

Guest: "Yes, yes. After all these attempts at persuasion with gentle language, there is still danger of corruption for the family..."

Host: "And the wife continues in her rebelliousness..."

Guest: "And the wife continues in her rebelliousness, there comes another stage, and this is the stage of banishing her from the bed, which is aimed at giving her a sense that 'I am not happy.'"

Host: "Yes."

Guest: "And if she persists and he gives her another chance during this same period and she continues for months, and sometimes even for years, with her refusal and rebellion here is revealed the wisdom of Islam: another means must be introduced. This is the means of the not-hard beatings, and the condition 'not hard' appears in the texts, it is not an interpretation. It is said in the *Hadiths* of the Prophet that we are talking of 'not-hard' beatings..."

Host: "What is the difference between 'hard' and 'not-hard?'"

Guest: "Hard beatings are those that leave marks on the body or on the face. Thus, beating on the face is prohibited, because the face is a combination of the features of beauty, as it is said. It is forbidden to beat the face, it is forbidden to administer blows that leave fractures or wounds this is what our sages have said in their books."

Host: "Doctor, the Qur'anic verse directs the husband in how to deal with a disobedient wife while if the husband is disobedient, let us assume now the husband is the rebellious one, the husband does not listen, the husband is neglectful, and the husband... rebels! The wife does not have the right to treat the husband in accordance with the three steps stated by the Qur'an. The wife, as it has been written, is restricted to admonition and guidance. She cannot banish him from the bed, and she cannot beat him. Do you not find inequality in this?"

Guest: "No, I do not find inequality in this, because as I said from the outset, the ultimate responsibility for managing the institution of family is given to the husband and therefore when the wife encounters disobedience on the part of her husband, or negative deeds, there is no doubt that she must remark on them and express her dissatisfaction with these deeds; she can go to his friends, his relatives, or her relatives so that they will take care of the problem..."

Host: "You mean that there are other means she can use to handle the husband?"

Guest: "Many means. She can, uh... She can... uh... ask him to get treatment for his problem. All these means. "However, for the situation to get to the point of beating, for example, I think that it is a kind of corruption, if, say, the wife is the one punishing her husband using beatings, because in this there is aggression against (the husband's) rule and responsibility. Besides, Islam has spared her the need to use her hand to beat, in order to preserve the woman's femininity, honor, and morality."

Host: "Doctor, we thank you for the interview and for the good words we have heard from you."

Al-Mutawah ended the show with a detailed explanation of wife-beating and how to deal with Western criticism of such activity.

Host: "The interview with the doctor was most enjoyable, and it gave us some of the meanings, but I would like to add to the doctor's words the claims spreading in the West today according to which, 'You Muslims are not giving the woman her rights; how have you given the husband three means for dealing with (the wife) and not give the wife three means for dealing with the husband? Why can't the woman beat the man?! Why can't the wife banish the husband from bed?!' And I say to you that anyone who studies Islamic religious law – who said that the wife cannot banish the husband from the bed in Islamic law?! Who said that the woman has no right to beat the man?! Do you want me to give you a lesson in Islamic religious law? Read the Islamic religious law and you will see that Islamic religious law gave women this right. There is, therefore, equality. Besides, on the subject of disobedience, there is no doubt that we are speaking of exceptional cases, as we have shown. And this, by the way, is an issue of choice – it is not compulsory. That is, even if the wife of a particular husband is disobedient, is he obliged to admonish and advise, to banish her from the bed, or to beat her? No, he is not obliged. If he says: 'By Allah, I have a brilliant idea that is not included in the three steps,' will we tell him: 'You cannot carry it out?' No, it is not prohibited. He may carry it out. Islamic religious law, therefore, comes to guide; the law comes to protect the family and stability... Therefore, although Islamic religious law permitted beatings, the sages came and discussed the subject of beatings. The most extreme of them was Ibn 'Abbas. I want to show you something that I keep in my pocket. Allah be praised, look... Ibn 'Abbas said that the husband must beat his wife with a handkerchief. Imagine this together with me. Can one beat with rods like we saw at the beginning of the program? No! He beats using a handkerchief! This is the interpretation of Ibn 'Abbas, which is an extreme interpretation. Another interpretation of the sages is that he beat his wife using toothpicks. This is because the point of the beatings is not revenge.

"If the beatings were for the purpose of revenge, the husband would sin. The point of the beatings is to convey a message: 'Oh so and so, I am not happy,' 'Oh so and so, behave yourself, behave like you should.' This is the lesson. Therefore, why did Ibn 'Abbas say that she should be beaten with a handkerchief? Can any of you believe this? Westerners are now coming to us complaining about the matter of beatings. All right, it doesn't happen among us that a wife dies because of husband's beating. And if something like this does happen in our society, it is considered rare, and all the newspapers talk of it, true or not? In contrast, the latest U.N. statistics from 1999-2000 say that every 12 seconds in the U.S. a wife is beaten by her husband and in some instances these beatings reach the point of killing the wife. Therefore, when the Westerners bring up complaints against us regarding our affairs, why shouldn't we be strong and bring up complaints against them regarding their affairs? Despite the existence of the verse in the Qur'an, no cases of death have been recorded in our society, and if there were, then these were rare cases. In contrast, they are without verse, religious law, or law, and despite this, every 12 seconds a wife is beaten by her husband! What is better?! A man must know... Therefore, when we have a dialogue with the West, we must talk with them based on foundations, based on culture, based on thought. That is one thing. Second, when they come and say to us that Islam gave the wife the right that her husband will banish her from the bed, but the wife does not banish the husband – Who said so?!

"The wife, in two instances, has the right to banish her husband from the bed. The first instance is if he asks to have sex with her in a place forbidden by religious law, let's say the anus and the second instance is if he behaves towards the wife in an offensive manner during sex. Then she is permitted to banish him from the bed. And who said that the wife has no right to beat her husband? This too is permitted her. This appears in a very important study by Dr. Muhammad Said Ramadan Al-Bouti. He said that Islam protects the soul of the woman, defends her biological structure. Her build is weaker than the man's and if Islam gave the wife the right to beat her husband – by Allah, her husband would break her! True or not? The husband with his build and muscles – the wife cannot handle him.

"But Islam gave the woman the right that the husband will be beaten by someone on her behalf. The husband is beaten by a man, and then the battle is waged between two men, and not between a man and a woman. Between two men. Therefore, if the husband scorned the wife, humiliated her, or treated her disrespectfully, the wife can go to court, and then the judge rules the wife her right. And so, if the wife wants the husband to be beaten, he will be beaten! But he will be beaten by court order, and then the battle is waged between the judge and the husband, and not between the husband and the wife, within the home. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, the matter must be discussed realistically and logically. If husband and wife ... even in one of the psychology conferences, when they presented this Qur'anic verse, there was a psychiatrist who converted to Islam because of this verse. He said: 'This is the first time that I see, in the holy book of a monotheistic religion, a social and psychological problem being handled by the Qur'an.' We all know that some men are afflicted with a mental illness known as 'sadism' and some women are also afflicted with a mental illness known as 'masochism.' What is the treatment for these mental illnesses? Beatings! He must treat her harshly! Even one of the sages claimed that this verse descended for those afflicted with this mental illness. Therefore, a husband married to a wife afflicted by this illness, let's say sadism – well, let him beat her because the beatings, for her, are a cure."





Study of Egyptian Government TV: Viewers Believe 'Women Deserve to be Beaten'

The May 22-28, 2003 issue of *Al-Ahram Weekly* featured an article by **Lina Mahmoud** on violence against women shown on Egyptian television. The article focused on the results of a media monitoring project conducted by the **New Woman Research Center (NWRC)** and the **Media House (MH)**, an independent production company. According to the article, the project, which monitored 18 television dramas [18] shown on Egyptian national television during Ramadan 2002, is the first of its magnitude to study the portrayal of violence against women in Egyptian media. The following are excerpts from the article as it appeared in English:

"The group counted the number of cases of violence shown on the programs. The study was conducted during the month of Ramadan because it is the month with the highest television viewer rates. According to Nalwa [sic] Darwish [of the NWRC], 'Audiovisual media has a great influence in shaping the collective consciousness of Egyptians. The

extremely high illiteracy rates in Egypt, among women in particular, give media an uncontested role in dictating people's behaviour and ideas...'

"The report of the findings of the study shows that all of the programs reviewed last Ramadan included scenes of violence against women. 'The problem is that those who perpetuate the violence are the heroes of the episodes, are those who are closest to the hearts of the audience and hence have the largest impact on them,' said the report.

"The report also addressed the ways viewers react to violence. Just as disturbing as the portrayals of violence against women is the lack of public outrage to them. In many cases, observers responded with either indifference or approval, making such aggression seem commonplace or justifiable.

"The majority of the women portrayed in the television episodes were housewives, followed by a large number of students. Unemployed individuals comprised 5.1 percent of the characters. The report argued that this is not an accurate representation and that the actual unemployment rate for women is much higher... Many of the soap operas featured educated characters, particularly university graduates, ignoring the fact that half of the Egyptian population is illiterate.

"Beating was the most prevalent mode of physical violence against women in the dramas, accounting for 42 percent of all physical aggression. Other forms of violence included killing (13.1 percent) and forms of sexual abuse. Incidents of verbal and sexual harassment were found in many of the shows and withholding sex from wives was portrayed as a form of punishment.

"In all of the cases of violence against women, 41.9 percent of the 'heroines' displayed active resistance, whereas 31.1 percent accepted the abuse. This resistance was usually verbal in form, although one woman reacted by killing herself and another became physically paralyzed. Further, 67.3 per cent of the men who acted violently against women displayed no remorse. Thirty percent felt guilty and shameful.

"Most of the women in the programs played negative roles. The few women who were portrayed positively were shown as naïve or harmless wives, lovers, and mothers.

"Darwish expressed her uneasiness at the results of the report. 'In 12 serials, there were 500 violent episodes. This means there are one or two scenes of violence in each part of a serial. This is too much. Moreover, not a single series was free of violence against women.'

"After the completion of the report, a documentary was filmed in which people were questioned about their reactions to violence in television dramas. 'Women deserve to be beaten,' responded one viewer. 'A husband should beat his wife if she does something wrong,' said another. One woman said that 'men are so cruel to women. They should be merciful.' A young man commented that beating a woman makes her 'more stubborn.'

"The meeting convened by the NWRC and MH [in which the study results were released] posed several important questions. What is required of the media? Should the media portray violence against women? Should television programs condemn violence against women or reflect it as it is? Most everyone seemed to agree, however, that television should stop stereotyping women negatively and avoid showing violence against women in a positive light." [\[19\]](#)

Muslim-Canadian Professor Explains: "There Are Cases, However, In Which A Wife Persists In Bad Habits"

Dr. Jamal Badawi, professor at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, and a cross-appointed faculty member in the Departments of Religious Studies and Management, has also explained that Islam allows beating ones wife. Badawi explains which circumstances permit "striking" a disobedient wife:

"If the problem relates to the wife's behavior, the husband may exhort her and appeal for reason. In most cases, this measure is likely to be sufficient. In cases where the problem persists, the husband may express his displeasure in another peaceful manner, by sleeping in a separate bed from hers. There are cases, however, in which a wife persists in bad habits and showing contempt of her husband and disregard for her marital obligations. Instead of divorce, the husband may resort to another measure that may save the marriage, at least in some cases. Such a measure is more accurately described as a gentle tap on the body, but never on the face, making it more of a symbolic measure than a punitive one.

Dr. Badawi elaborates on six instances regarding the permissibility of wife-beating as follows:

"a) It must be seen as a rare exception to the repeated exhortation of mutual respect, kindness and good treatment. Based on the Qur'an and *Hadith*, this measure may be used in the cases of lewdness on the part of the wife or extreme refraction and rejection of the husband's reasonable requests on a consistent basis (*nushuz*). Even then, other measures, such as exhortation, should be tried first.

" b) As defined by *Hadith*, it is not permissible to strike anyone's face, cause any bodily harm or even be harsh. What the *Hadith* qualifies as *dharban ghayra mubarrih*, or light striking, was interpreted by early jurists as a (symbolic) use of *siwak*! They further qualified permissible 'striking' as that which leaves no mark on the body. It is interesting that this latter fourteen-centuries-old qualifier is the criterion used in contemporary American law to separate a light and harmless tap or strike from 'abuse' in the legal sense. This makes it clear that even this extreme, last resort, and 'lesser of the two evils' measure that may save a marriage does not meet the definitions of 'physical abuse,' 'family violence,' or 'wife battering' in the 20th century law in liberal democracies, where such extremes are so commonplace that they are seen as national concerns.

" c) The permissibility of such symbolic expression of the seriousness of continued refraction does not imply its desirability. In several *Hadiths*, the Prophet (pbuh) discouraged this measure. Here are some of his sayings in this regard: 'Do not beat the female servants of Allah'; 'Some (women) visited my family complaining about their husbands (beating them). These (husbands) are not the best of you.' In another *Hadith* the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said: 'How does any one of you beat his wife as he beats the stallion camel and then he may embrace (sleep with) her?'

"d) True following of the Sunnah is to follow the example of the Prophet (pbuh) who never resorted to that measure, regardless of the circumstances.

"e) Islamic teachings are universal in nature. They respond to the needs and circumstances of diverse times, cultures and circumstances. Some measures may work in some cases and cultures or with certain persons but may not be effective in others. By definition, a 'permissible' act is neither required, encouraged, or forbidden. In fact it may be to spell out the extent of permissibility, such as in the issue at hand, rather than leaving it unrestricted or unqualified, or ignoring it all together. In the absence of strict qualifiers, persons may interpret the matter in their own way, which can lead to excesses and real abuse.

"f) Any excess, cruelty, family violence, or abuse committed by any 'Muslim' can never be traced, honestly, to any revelatory text (Qur'an or *Hadith*). Such excesses and violations are to be blamed on the person(s) himself, as it shows that they are paying lip service to Islamic teachings and injunctions and failing to follow the true Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh)." [20]

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[1] <http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=1058187705&rn=1>.

[2] In a similar incident, a Turkish state-funded religious foundation published retired Turkish cleric **Kemal Guran's** *'The Muslim's Handbook'*(2000) which recommended wife-beating but warns "not to strike the women's face, but to hit her gently elsewhere." At the time of the book's release, **Turkish parliamentarian Ferda Cilalioglu** called it "scandalous" and "insane." (www.islamonline.com, August 13, 2000).

[3] *Roz Al-Yousef* (Egypt), January 30, 2004.

[4] Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf. *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*. Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organization, 1984. p.205-206.

[5] *Al-Jazeera* (Qatar), October 5, 1977.
<http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/shareea/articles/2003/5/5-28-6.htm>.

[6] *Islam Online*,
<http://www.islamonline.net/fatwa/arabicFatwaDisplay.asp?hFatwaID=1484>

[7] The *Saudi Gazette* reports that the issue of wife-beating is a pressing one among Muslims in the Middle East as well. 300 women recently initiated a lawsuit against their husbands for "brutal beating and unjustified physical abuse. *Saudi Gazette*, March 3, 2004.

[8] MEMRI [Special Report No. 23](#), November 26, 2003, ' The Islamic Affairs Department of the Saudi Embassy in Washington, D.C. '

[9] In Saudi Arabia today, women are denied certain rights and privileges afforded to male citizens. Women are denied the right to drive a car, to obtain a state identification without the consent and presence of a male guardian, or to travel outside the country without the permission a ma