



**Muslim Women's Coalition  
Greater Washington, DC Area Office  
Presents...**

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**“Women Care for Women’s  
Wellbeing”**

*MWC’s educational workshop series  
on women’s health*

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**“Identifying Abuse in Relationships and  
Developing tools for Mutual Respect  
and Understanding.”**

**Saturday October 1, 2011**

MWC invited Salma Abugideiri to conduct the third workshop in our Women Care for Women’s Wellbeing series on the topic of abusive and healthy relationships.

Our members enjoyed this introductory workshop and look forward to participating in additional MWC

workshops with Salma.

Salma is a licensed professional counselor and the co-director of Peaceful Families (PFP).

PFP is a national organization based in Virginia devoted to ending domestic violence in Muslim families by facilitating awareness workshops for Muslim leaders and communities, providing cultural sensitivity trainings for professionals, conducting research, and developing resources.

(<http://www.peacefulfamilies.org>)

*One in three women is abused world wide. Abuse is a leading cause of death for women. Domestic Violence is a public health issue. The shock and horror caused by domestic violence is an important factor in raising awareness amongst society as compared to desensitizing it.*

15 women attended this workshop.



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Women Care for Women's Wellbeing was initiated to provide women in our local community a supportive social container where they feel safe and accepted by fellow women to openly discuss sensitive issues. By creating a positive atmosphere, women are empowered to develop their understanding of the issues revolving around abuse. We hope that each attendee will make a conscious decision to further develop their keen interest in issues related to domestic violence.

*"And among His signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. Verily in that are signs for those who reflect." (Qur'an 30:21*



It was our pleasure to meet Hunsun Jung (second from the right) from the American University! Hunsun is from South Korea and is interested in learning about Islam and the rights of women in Islam. She is currently volunteering with MWC.

*Join us in developing mutual respect and understanding in our homes and stopping any form of violence now.*

*The following notes are disseminated for your information:*

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## ***Becoming Aware of Abuse:***

We learnt that abuse knows no boundaries such as race color or religion. There are many kinds of abuse such as Verbal, Emotional and Physical. Sexual abuse is rarely spoken about because it is considered very private, but many women are vulnerable to it nonetheless. Physical abuse can include pulling, shoving, and hitting. Unfortunately physical violence can result in one's death. Name calling is another form of violence. When one repeatedly says, "you are stupid" or "you are a bad Muslim" the victim starts believing it and eventually dies psychologically. All of the above contributes toward low self-esteem.

There can be abuse between couples, between siblings and between extended relatives and friends. Domestic violence in Muslim communities is reported on a daily basis, but it was shocking to learn that one Muslim woman dies from domestic violence every month, according to Salma. Although more women are reportedly physically abused by men, it was note worthy that more men are reporting abuse now and more men are verbally abused in relationships than women.

The reasons for abuse vary. Often a leading factor for abuse is a power struggle when one party attempts to dominate the other.

Abuse can be cyclical. We've seen this in many Muslim cultures where the mother in-law asserts power over her daughter in -law. In many circumstances the daughter - in law later asserts the same power when she becomes a mother in-law.

It seems like a learnt behavior pattern that is repeated from one generation to the next. In fact, Salma stated that many children learn patterns of behaviors from their parents and repeat them in their lives. Many boys who see their fathers abusing their mothers will have a similar attitude towards women and may treat their mothers or wives with disrespect. They may even end up in gangs and seek "help" out side of home. She stated that the Juvenile Justice System regularly reports a startling number of youth who resort to violence and join gangs. Similarly, daughters may have boy friends and end up in abusive relationships.

Women who face forced sex situations in marriages face the dilemma of being a "good" and "obedient" wife and they often decline or are hesitant to seek help. They get beaten by their husbands if they refuse them in such circumstances. When abusive men are questioned, they often claim, "she deserved it." There is always the risk of being killed in such relationships and social workers need to mediate. Salma gave us an example of the case of Mahvish Noorani. Last

Ramadan after Iftar Mahvish's husband arranged to have his wife killed while she was taking the child out on a stroller. Some cases make headlines but most don't.

Women fear from getting divorce and it seems more of a cultural issue than a religious one. Many are confronted by remarks by the community, asking "what kind of a woman wants a divorce?" In many scenarios women are threatened constantly by husbands with words of "talaq," or divorce, and are confused whether they are married or divorced in their marriage. Many in such situations do not take divorce because they think it is "haram," or prohibited. Salma pointed out that they do not realize that divorce is "halal." Many abused women are shocked to learn that domestic violence is prohibited in Islam.

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### ***Additional helpful tools and notes:***

- *Muslim Women's Coalition will be doing an in depth workshop on creating respectful limits for oneself and developing tools for mutual understanding in 2012.*
- Develop awareness. Abuse happens when you don't know what abuse is and are not aware of your rights as a person. Fear of others and ignorance are the key factors for becoming victims of abuse.
- Seek confidants i.e. School councilor, family friends or have God parents provided for children whom they can trust.
- Develop positive values at home.
- Self development – how to build self esteem? How to communicate and assert oneself in a positive way? Assertion versus power struggle.
- Religion: Effective tool. But first step is recognizing there is a problem.
- Healthy relationships: Core value or heart of any healthy relationship is respect. Parents teach that by example. Prophet Muhammad saw was very kind to everyone and especially his family.
- Establish equal roles for both genders such as good behavior towards everyone and not what cultures tell us sometimes that men are superior to women. Allah says in the Holy Quran that both are created from one soul.
- Know your resources. Keep information handy for your self and others.

## ***From our Website:***

*Gender equality is an important principle in Islam. In the context of faith, there is no distinction between any Muslim, man or woman. Both men and women have the same rights and obligations, are entitled to enjoy God's bounties and are promised the same rewards in heaven.*

*The Muslim Women's Coalition (MWC) commits to empower women within our local communities, to raise awareness on issues that effect women in the global community. As a faith-based organization, our work is guided by the Islamic principles of compassion and respect for all humanity.*



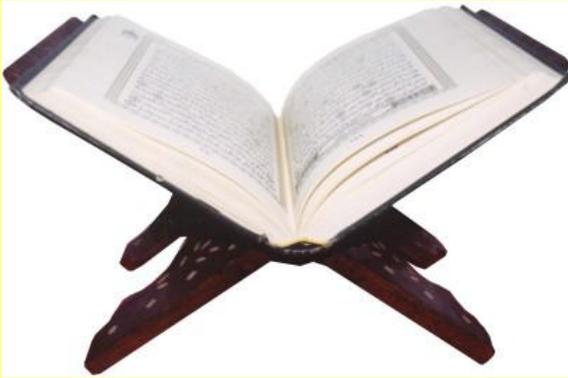
### **MWC: Inspired by our faith: Engaging one woman; empowering humanity Women in Our Islamic Heritage**

It is important to note that in the Muslim world, women's rights were not imported, but were given 1400 years ago. The Holy Quran explicitly defines rights for women such as inheritance rights, right to divorce and right to education etc. Women were not to be considered the properties of men. Both men and women have been addressed equally in terms of righteousness. However, with many wrong interpretations of the Holy verses by narrow-minded clergies women have been subjugated to legal systems that need reform. MWC's "Women in our Islamic Heritage" brings forth unique role models from our Islamic heritage that continues to shape the lives of many today. Their strong and individual personality and the wealth of knowledge they carried influenced many learned men of their times. By renewing these examples for Muslim women we can encourage women to take the lead in empowering themselves and others through their heritage.

*A Sufi saint and poet Jalaluddin Rumi r.a. said:*

“The Prophet, to whose speech the whole world was enslaved, used to say, ‘Speak to me, O Aisha!’ The Prophet said that women dominate men of intellect and possessors of hearts. But ignorant men dominate women, for they are shackled by the ferocity of animals, they have no kindness, gentleness, or love, since animality dominates their nature. Love and kindness are human attributes; anger and sensuality belong to the animals. She is not your ‘sweetheart’! She is the radiance of God”

*(The Naqshbandi Sufi Way).*



MWC’s position on “The Rights of Women in Islam” is based on this verse in the Holy Quran where both a woman and a man are addressed alike:

For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in Charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward. -Qur'an, Al-Ahzab, Surah 33:35

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*Please direct your questions or comments to*

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