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A Socio-Religious Comparative Analysis of Islamic and Christian Perspectives on Domestic Violence Against Women

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence against women remains one of the most serious violations of human rights affecting women in all societies around the world. Even though both Islam and Christianity emphasize justice, compassion, and the sanctity of family life, there are certain passages in both scriptures which have been misinterpreted and given rise to debates on gender roles and marital authority. Therefore, there exist misunderstandings regarding the religion which have shaped the public perception of domestic violence. The objective of the study was to compare the perspective of both Islam and Christianity on domestic violence against women in order to discover the extent to which the truth of the religion can support or deny any violence within the family. The main purpose was to find out the similarities and differences between religions, to differentiate the religious teachings from the cultural practices, and to check the role of religious leaders in stopping domestic violence or establishment of women's rights. A qualitative research design was utilized utilizing a comparative method. The primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted among 10 religious scholars who were five Muslim scholars and five Christians scholars selected conveniently using purposive sampling based on their religious knowledge and experience. Interview data were then analyzed in accordance with thematic analysis. The analysis has shown that there are seven themes (1) respect for women and their dignity, (2) condemning domestic violence as something that goes against the true teaching of religion, (3) interpreting religious texts in their context (4) social and cultural reasons behind domestic violence (5) involvement of religious leaders in fighting such violence (6) securing women's rights and (7) ways to stop domestic violence. Both communities Muslim and Christian scholars confirmed that women have their dignity and domestic violence does not comply with the morality of religions. Islamic scholars stressed that interpretation of the Qur'an should be conducted in a wider context of justice, mercy, and Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) attitudes toward women. It has been disclosed in the findings that many of the causes of domestic violence can be traced back to both certain cultural norms of patriarchy, as well as such things as misinterpretation of scriptures, inadequate religious education, poverty, substance abuse, poor communication skills, and lack of proper implementation of laws rather than the core teachings of Islam or Christianity. The results of this study revealed remarkable similarity between Islam and Christianity regarding domestic violence against women.



Introduction

Domestic abuse against women is a worldwide human rights, public health, and social justice problem that exists in all cultures and religions regardless of geographical region. As per the World Health Organization, one in three women across the world suffers physical and/or sexual violence from her partner or sexual violence at the hands of a non-partner in her life (WHO 2021). Although religion is most often thought of as a source of moral support, dignity, and protection of women, the texts have also been understood in some cases to promote gender-related violence. Therefore, it is important that authentic interpretation of religion is made with regard to domestic violence in order to achieve justice and protect women's rights.

Islam and Christianity, the two biggest world religions, have many similarities in their teachings, both religions promote human dignity, compassion, justice, and respect for one another in the context of family life. Both religions view marriage as a sacred relationship based on love and respect for each other. However, there are certain religious texts, i.e. Qur'an 4:34 and Ephesians 5:22–24, have sparked significant theological discussions concerning marriage, gender roles, and the legal implications of physical punishments. Many modern-day academics now argue that these scriptures ought to be read in light of their historical, lingual, and ethical background rather than being used to endorse domestic violence (Westfall, 2016).

Many modern jurists, as part of Islamic scholarship, argue that the principles of justice (adl), compassion (rahmah), and kindness (ihsan) present in the Qur'an explicitly disapprove of the practice of domestic violence. They note the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) commitment to kindness with regard to women and his rejection of violence against their spouses (Barlas, 2002; Wadud, 1999). In a similar manner, several modern Christian theologians claim that Jesus' teachings on sacrifice, mutual submission, and respect are completely contrary to the practice of domestic violence and against the patriarchal interpretation of religious documents, which leads to abusive behavior (Nason-Clark, 2009; Westfall, 2016).

Nevertheless, domestic violence still exists in Muslim and Christian societies. Researchers point out that it mostly derives from patriarchal norms and traditions associated with societies, poverty, and incorrect interpretations of religious texts rather than doctrines of the religions mentioned (Flood & Pease, 2009; Nason-Clark, 2009). Therefore, the comparative analysis of Islam and Christianity will illuminate the fact that true religious teachings can serve the purpose of protecting women while displaying the essence of the cultural practices of the religions.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the position of Islam when it comes to domestic violence against women according to the Qur'an, Hadith and modern Islamic scholars.
2. To explore Christian attitudes towards domestic violence based on Biblical text and modern Christian theological interpretations.
3. To compare how Islamic interpretations differ from Christian teachings about domestic violence against women.
4. To identify differences between religious teachings and cultural practices of people when it comes to the issue of domestic violence.
5. To find out how Islam and Christianity can work together in curbing domestic violence and protecting women and their rights.

Literature Review

Domestic violence perpetrated against women has received considerable traction when it comes to its study from disciplines such as sociology, theology, law, and gender studies. While older literature tended to view domestic violence as a result of religious doctrines, newer publications are increasingly differentiating the fundamental principles espoused by religions from patriarchal cultural practices that shape the understanding of sacred texts. Scholars agree that neither Christianity nor Islam serves as an advocate of domestic violence but rather that distorted interpretations of traditions and scriptures make it possible for this practice to exist.

With regard to Islamic studies, they mostly focus on interpreting Qur'an 4:34, which is one of the most discussed verses concerning marital relations. Traditional scholars have interpreted the verse in question as allowing limited physical punishment in rare cases. Modern Muslim scholars argue against such interpretations of the verse, claiming that they reflect the specifics of historical periods rather than the teaching of Islam as a whole. Some Islamic scientists such as Amina Wadud (1999), Asma Barlas (2002), and Kecia Ali (2006) believe that core Islamic principles of justice (adl), mercy (rahmah), and mutual respect do not allow for domestic violence.

Many empirical studies have been conducted regarding family violence in Muslim communities. According to Ahmed and co-authors (2019), family violence in Islam was determined not only by religious factors but also by socio-economic circumstances, traditions of patriarchy and migration experience. In a similar vein, Afrouz et al. (2020) investigated different factors that impede Muslim women from getting help. According to this systematic study, family pressures, stigma from the community, social expectations and limited support of the institutions are the most serious obstacles to the search for help.

Christian scholars have similarly reviewed biblical teachings which have often been used to validate male authority in marriage. The focus has been specifically on Ephesians 5:22-33, which has been traditionally viewed as a mandate for wives' submission to their husbands. Newer scholars such as Cynthia Long Westfall (2016) suggest an interpretation that views this passage within the context of mutual submission as described in Ephesians 5:21 and love of Christ. Nancy Nason-Clark (2009) has shown that domestic violence occurs in Christian families just like in other sections of society, indicating that it is more of a social issue than a result of Christianity.

Studies aimed to establish the link between Christianity and domestic violence also reveal that faith may function both as a risk factor and as a protective element. The systematic review by Beltrán-Aroca et al. (2021) shows that while patriarchal interpretations may discourage women who suffer domestic abuse from leaving their relationship, faith communities provide useful resources for coping and recovering from the trauma.

Comparison studies show clear parallels between Islam and Christianity concerning the moral foundations of marriage. The essential values for both religions are love, compassion, justice, forgiveness, and the idea of women's dignity. Contemporary experts increasingly assert that there is no real justification for domestic violence in light of religion and its teachings; rather, domestic violence appears as a product of patriarchal culture and selective interpretations of scripture. Chaudhry (2013) notes that Muslim scholars and Christian scholars encounter similar obstacles in reconciling the historical interpretations of given religious teachings with modern ideas about gender equality and human rights.

Despite numerous studies on domestic violence in both religions, much less research examines the commonalities and differences between Islam and Christianity relating to the given offspring in

terms of religion, law, and human rights. Existing studies tend to focus on one religion, one religious text, or one sociocultural context. Hence, this research aims to fill the gap in the existing body of literature and to examine Islamic and Christian teachings about domestic violence against women.

Research Methodology

The sample was of 10 religious scholars 5 from Muslim religion and 5 from Christianity. Tool for data collection was in-depth interview.

Thematic Analysis of Religious Scholars' Perspectives on Domestic Violence Against Women

Theme	Muslim Scholars	Christian Scholars	Comparative Interpretation
1. The Status of Women	scholars agreed that women are dignified in their rights and religious beliefs.	Every scholar believes that women are created in God's image and treated with dignity.	Both religions emphasize the dignity of women.
2. Domestic Violence has no religious justification	Four scholars condemned domestic violence. One scholar noted that there are special interpretations of some parts of the holy book.	All five scholars agreed on the wrongness of domestic acts of violence according to the tenets of Christianity.	Both faiths condemn domestic violence.
3. Interpreting the Scriptures	Scholars pointed out that Qur'an 4:34 must be interpreted in the context of the Prophet's example of good behavior.	Scholars interpreting the Scripture obeyed its true message of mutual love and respect.	Both groups advocate contextual interpretation of complex issues over the literal one.
4. Common Patriarchy, causes for domestic violence	Patriarchy, ignorance regarding religion, economic hardship, and anger were said to be the main reasons for violence.	Patriarchal, misinterpreted holy writings, substance abuse, and poor family factors were the violence instead of communication were the main religion.	Both fields emphasize that social and cultural factors are to blame for the violence instead of religion.
5. The function of religious leaders	Imams should serve families by educating them, ensuring social justice, and advising couples.	Pastors should preach against violence, provide thought to play an important role in assisting victims.	Religious leaders were important in combating domestic violence.
6. Women's rights and protection	Researchers remarked on the Islamic faith, including equality before the God, for their right to financial maintenance, social respect, assistance of victims protection from violence, and legal assistance.	Researchers pointed out the significance of acknowledged the need for safeguarding women's rights and lives.	Both traditions have acknowledged the need for safeguarding women's rights and lives.
7. Prevention methods	They said pre-marriage education, genuine Islamic family education, church of	They've advised the use of education, church of	Both agreed on the use of education,

Theme	Muslim Scholars	Christian Scholars	Comparative Interpretation
	teaching, consultations, and counseling, enforcement of laws.	publicity counseling, and legal enforcement measures.	and law as prevention measures.

Interpretation of Table

The results of thematic analysis recognize that both Muslim and Christian religious scholars agree that domestic violence against women contradicts the essence of their religions. All respondents agreed that women are entitled to dignity and respect. Although the scholars referred to various scriptures and religious concepts, all of them expressed the idea that marriage should be a relationship based on mutual caring, not oppression.

As for the scholarly view on the acceptability of domestic violence, the vast majority of Muslim scholars and all Christian scholars objected to any kind of violence. Muslim scholars highlighted that Quran 4:34 should be interpreted in its historical and linguistic context and taking into account the Prophet Muhammad's behaviour regarding women. The same metaphor was used by Christian scholars when explaining the biblical verses pertaining to the idea of submission of women.

The results also reveal that the two sets of participants consider social and cultural conditions as the main causes of domestic violence, rather than religion. The participants named patriarchal customs, misinterpretation of holy books, lack of religious education, communication barriers, economic insecurity, substance abuse, and poor knowledge of the issue. This implies that it is not religion but the misuse of religion that legitimizes domestic violence.

Another crucial point is the joint understanding of the important role of religious leaders in eliminating domestic violence. For instance, Muslim scholars stated that Imams have the duty to instruct people about true Islam, while Christian scholars mentioned pastors due to their responsibility in the sphere of pastoral care. Both groups of scholars agreed about the fact that religious organizations should fight against harmful practices and protect women.

In conclusion, there are parallels between the preventive measures recommended by Islamic and Christian scholars, namely those of teaching religious values, premarital counseling, family counseling, ensuring that the population is informed, and enforcing laws to protect women. The results of thematic analysis show that Islam and Christianity possess significant similarities in denouncing domestic violence and endorsing justice, compassion, equality, and respect in the family. The few differences observed concern scriptural interpretation and theological terms used rather than the main principles of the religions concerning violence against women.

Discussion

The outcomes of the thematic analysis show that both Muslim and Christian religious scholars reject domestic violence against women as contradictory to the fundamental principles of their religions. Although the two faiths have different theological bases and scriptural traditions, the respondents share the common belief that marriage should be based on love, compassion, justice, and respect for each other. These results coincide with the findings of Barlas (2002) who contends that the Qur'an teaches equality and justice instead of male superiority, and with Westfall (2016) who asserts that the New Testament stands for reciprocal submission and sacrificial love instead of an authoritarian approach.

A significant idea highlighted during the series of interviews held is that some contentious parts of the Scripture must be understood within their historical and textual context. Muslim scholars pointed out that Qur'an 4:34 could not be interpreted on its own but should be viewed together with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) in the area of kindness and compassion towards women. This view is consistent with Wadud's (1999), Ali's (2006), and Chaudhry's (2013) argument about the prevalence of patriarchal interpretations over Qur'an important values like fairness, mercy, and respect for human being. Similarly, Christian scholars state that the meaning of Ephesians 5:22–33 should be analyzed in the context of Ephesians 5:21, where believers are instructed to submit to one another with respect to Christ. This view was supported by Westfall (2016), as he contended that the verses in the Bible must not be used as a pretext for domestic violence.

Adding to the significant finding was the conclusion that domestic violence was not an event for religious reasons but for cultural and social issues. The causes mentioned were customs related to patriarchy, lack of religious knowledge, poverty, addiction, and poor conflict resolution skills. The study supports previous findings showing that domestic violence derives from cultural norms and social inequalities instead of religious teachings. Afrouz et al (2020) also stated that Muslim women are often hindered in their help seeking from communities because of stigma, familial pressure, and cultural expectations instead of religious obligations.

The authors also mentioned the significance of religious leaders in halting domestic violence. Muslim respondents pointed out the duty of Imams to educate the public on what Islam says about families and female rights while those of Christian faith emphasized the role of pastors, who should provide victims with support and counsel families. All findings agree with Nason-Clark's (2009) assertions regarding the importance of faith communities in the fight against domestic violence if religious leaders undertake active positions.

There are clear similarities in the suggested remedies put forward by both teams of experts. The participants have suggested the need for religious education, premarital counseling, family counseling, information campaigns, and settled laws protecting women. These suggestions follow the position of the World Health Organization (2021).

In general, the data illustrate that there is a high degree of agreement between Islamic and Christian views on domestic violence against women. There is a variation in terms of interpreting the scriptures and the words used in theology, but there is a consensus on the point that religious teachings instruct that people should respect and behave fairly with women.

Conclusion

The study in question dealt with various perspectives, explaining the notions of Islamic religion and Christian faith on domestic violence against women. Five Muslim scholars and five Christian scholars were consulted. The results showed that there is a clear consistency among the two religions with regard to the treatment of women and the disapproval of domestic violence. Despite the fact that Islam and Christianity differ in theology, religious law, and interpretation of scriptures, they both highlight human dignity and justice, compassion and mercy, respect and cooperation in the family life. The study has shown by the consulted scholars of both religions that the violence applied to women goes against the basic ethical principles of their respective religions and is unacceptable in the light of their genuine religious teaching.

The thematic analysis brought to light seven important topics: the sanctification of women's dignity, the denial of domestic abuse, interpretation of the sacred text according to the context of a

situation, causes of violence originating from socio-cultural background, contribution of religious leaders, safeguarding of women's rights, and measures for abuse prevention. All of these issues indicate that domestic violence is not simply a social issue but one that is affected by different factors of influence such as cultural traditions, patriarchal mode of thought, economic situation, defect of knowledge about religions, and weak social support mechanisms. It also supports the findings from previous studies, according to which religion is often misused for the sake of legitimizing victimization, while in reality religion teaches the principles of justice, kindness, and respect for any social category.

This study provides a unique contribution through its comparative perspective, which underscores both the commonalities and differences in the theology of the two religions, Islam and Christianity. Muslim scholars pointed out that the teachings in the Qur'an should be understood with reference to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who exemplified compassion, mercy, and respect toward women. In a similar way, Christian scholars pointed out that the teachings outlined in the Bible regarding marriage must be appreciated in view of the teaching of Christ to love, to be of service to one another, and to take care of one another. As a result, both Muslim and Christian scholars rejected interpretations of religious texts aiming to back domestic violence, but promoted the contextual and moral readings of the texts which correspond to the broader objectives of their religions.

Another crucial finding of the study is the acknowledgement of religious leaders as change agents in society. Participants acknowledged the ability of the Imams, priests, and other religious leaders to educate communities, fight against negative cultural practices, promote good marital relations, and give support to victims. This is particularly important in societies where religion is highly significant in people's attitudes and in the family values. By contributing to accurate religious guidance, counseling, and advocacy for women's rights, religious leaders can significantly decrease domestic violence.

The research shows that domestic violence prevention requires collaboration and a multidisciplinary approach. Religious organizations cannot end domestic violence alone without the help of government bodies, educational institutions, judicial systems, hospitals, and civil organizations. Effective prevention should involve the combination of religious knowledge with protection provided by law, public education campaigns, psychological help, and support of survivors.

In conclusion, the results obtained in this research indicate that true Islamic and Christian teachings are associated with justice, compassion, equality, and respect instead of violence or oppression. Hence, domestic violence should be regarded as a result of cultural misinterpretations, male-dominating systems of power, and the wrong usage of the religious doctrine, not as direct reflection of the beliefs provided by Islam or Christianity. Sensitization towards the religion, contextual interpretation of spiritual texts, women's empowerment, cooperation between religious and secular institutions can be beneficial for addressing domestic issues.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Ensure accurate religious teachings: Religious organizations need to provide accurate teachings about the fact that both Christianity and Islam condemn domestic violence.
2. Train scholars of religion: Imams, priests, pastors, and other religious leaders have to undergo special training to learn how to provide effective support to victims of domestic violence.

3. Support contextual interpretation of religious texts: Religious scholars need to promote ways to interpret religious texts in a manner that relates these interpretations to such principles as justice, compassion, and mutual respect.
4. Make premarital and marital counseling more effective: Faith-based organizations, churches, and mosques have to offer counseling services that help couples learn about healthy relationships, conflict resolution, and responsibilities.
5. Increase people's understanding of the issue: Governments, educational institutions, and religious organizations should join their efforts in organizing awareness campaigns aimed at making people aware of the fact that domestic violence is a violation of human rights and contradicts religious teachings.
6. Strengthen women's legal protection: Policymakers need to enhance the enforcement of the laws designed to offer protection to women.
7. Encourage interfaith collaboration: Muslim and Christian leaders must engage in interfaith initiatives to promote common principles of peace, justice, compassion, and respect for women as a way of eliminating violence.
8. Enable social and economic empowerment of women: States and civil society organizations should implement programs that improve the access of women to education, employment, financial independence, and leadership thus lowering their chances of being abused.
9. Add domestic violence education to the academic syllabus: Universities, seminaries, and other educational institutions should introduce courses on domestic violence, gender equality, family ethics, and human rights into their educational curricula.
10. Conduct comparative research: Future studies should use larger samples, including scholars, survivors, community leaders, and experts from different cultures and religions and using qualitative and quantitative methods.

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