



UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

All unwanted sexual acts - whether harassment, abuse, or assault - committed against another person, without that person's freely given consent, is sexual violence and can be prosecuted as a crime. Sexual violence is not about sex, gratification, or sexual rights over another. It is about the power and control an abuser has over their victim. There are many techniques that the abuser may use in order to establish that power and control over the victim; in religious and cultural communities, that often involves misappropriating religious and cultural traditions to justify the violence. This type of violence and abusive techniques are the complete antithesis to the tradition of Islam, which has compassion, justice, and kindness at the root of all its human interactions.

Victim Blaming & Rape Culture

Relying on societal attitudes and gender stereotypes to justify abuse. Examples: saying victim tempted the abuser; wouldn't have been assaulted if they just followed Islam; gaslighting the victim to question their reality by insisting it didn't happen the way the victim describes it, or that they are angry and seeking revenge; in instance of male rape, using homophobia to question the masculinity or sexuality of the person because "men don't get raped."

Threats and Intimidation

Using threats or intimidation to blackmail, coerce, shame, or disclose personal details about the victim publicly. Examples: will expose the relationship to others to shame the victim (in premarital, extramarital, or same sex situations); will call Child and Family Services to take the kids away or get custody; intimidating the victim to not call police or receive counseling in order to protect "family honor."

Using Secrecy

Insisting that the relationship needs to remain private for the time being and making false promises. Examples: telling the victim that the relationship has to be secret because no one will understand; that they will get married soon; that their marriage will only have to remain a secret for a short while.

Using Shame

Shaming the victim into silence by using emotional manipulation, which could result in excommunication from a community or family. Examples: using arguments like "no one will believe you," "what will people say," or "no one will want to marry you if you leave me" to coerce victims to stay; threatening to publicly ruin their or their family's reputation, or generally destroying their reputation (e.g. slut shaming, isn't a virgin, mentally unstable, bad character.)

Gendered Islamophobia

Using current fearmongering techniques to coerce victim to not report. Examples: threatening to call immigration enforcement, FBI, or threatening to report the victim as a potential terrorist; silencing the victim to not report abuser because they are bringing shame upon the community and responsible for, or contributing to, Islamophobia; coercing victim to not report because abuser will be tried as a terrorist.

Exploitation

Using immigration, financial dependence, housing, mental health or health status to silence a victim. Examples: threatening financial instability or deportation if abuse is reported; makes victim dependent on them; demands sex in exchange for housing, food, employment, medications and other life needs, controlling access to key documents, the victim's physical living, work, school, and other spaces; threatening to or transmitting STDs/STIs and then threatening to disclose that information.

Spiritual Abuse

Using religious doctrine, religious authority and male privilege to justify behavior. Examples: abuser may try to escape accountability by saying "I know more than you," "Secret marriage is lawful," "Men have a degree over women;" abuser may demand that they have sexual rights, or use the threat of polygamy to coerce their spouse to have sex; abuser may control what the victim wears under the guise of "modesty" or dictate what "appropriate" gender interactions are and aren't.

Grooming

The majority of victims - child and adult - know their abusers, who use emotional tactics to gain the victim's trust. Examples: buying lavish gifts or grand, romantic gestures; showering extra attention on a victim or giving them special treatment, crossing boundaries and demanding sexual acts in order to keep the gifts and attention; using religious authority or otherwise to make the victim believe their relationship is normal and lawful.