

**Understanding Sexual Violence & Working Toward Prevention:
A Resource for Professionals Working with Youth**

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Executive Summary

Understanding Sexual Violence and Working toward Prevention is a resource created by HEART Women & Girls and Maryam Mirza of Hamdard Center for Health and Human Services and is partly adapted from a previous collaborative toolkit: *Engaging Muslim Communities in Ending Sexual Exploitation*. This paper is for groups within Muslim communities such as educators, school administrators, other mental health professionals and any other individuals who are committed to working to prevent sexual violence from plaguing our communities. This paper provides background information on issues surrounding the various forms of sexual violence, including definitions, statistics, barriers to reporting, and how certain cultural factors and messaging create environments ripe for sexual violence to occur. This paper can be used to raise awareness and mobilize your community to work toward addressing sexual violence, creating safer communities for our survivors, so that ultimately we can start reducing the prevalence of such horrible crimes. As Muslims, we are obligated to take action on this issue and work to protect the most vulnerable. The Quran reminds us to stand up against injustice, even if against ourselves, and so, there is no choice but to be a voice for justice and to stand with those who are suffering.

This paper includes the following information:

- Background information such as definitions, types of sexual violence and statistics;
- Myths & facts;
- Barriers facing survivors with respect to reporting
- Practical tips and strategies on how to begin addressing the issue and raising awareness, and
- Resources, both faith-based and secular, that you can refer to for further information

Introduction

In light of recent sexual assault allegations in numerous Muslim communities throughout the United States and Canada, it is clear that the need for increased awareness and education on sexual violence is long overdue. Muslim communities can play a key role in working to create safer communities for all and reducing the prevalence of sexual violence. As such, the Muslim tradition is rooted in the concepts of justice and commitment to serving others, and these overarching values from the foundation for Muslim leadership roles in social justice efforts throughout the world¹. Sexual assault and sexual abuse are human rights violations that occur much too often - with 1 in 6 women being a victim of sexual violence sometime in her lifetime. As long as people remain unaware of the root cause and extent of sexual violence, the cycle of abuse will continue and the trauma and suffering experienced by survivors will not end. Muslims can be both a vehicle for raising awareness and advocating on behalf of victims of sexual violence by adopting a victim-centric approach.

The invisibility of sexual violence against all people, including women, men, children, and LGBTQ people has been an issue of concern for many community activists. The problem is not specific to one community or culture, but rather is a reality throughout the world. Statistical evidence cannot realistically portray the occurrence of sexual violence, as many victims are silenced by the stigmas associated with sexual abuse². This is particularly true in the Muslim community. Research and culturally-sensitive resources and services are still relatively limited in the Muslim community, as studies of relevant issues, such as domestic violence, have only gained traction in recent years. As a result, the community has been slow in creating safe spaces that also tend to the unique cultural and religious needs of sexual assault survivors— most mosques, Islamic schools, and community centers do not have professionals and leaders equipped to address and counsel survivors³. Moreover, the cultural barriers to addressing these issues for Muslims often prevent Muslim survivors from pursuing or trusting the secular resources and professionals that do exist.

As mentioned earlier, the Rape, Incest & Abuse National Network estimates that approximately 1 in 6 women are victims of sexual violence sometime in their lifetime. There is no reason to believe that the prevalence is any different in Muslim communities. In fact, the unfortunate reality is that sexual violence happens much more frequently in the Muslim community than is addressed, and has profound implications on an individual's physical, spiritual, social and mental well-being.

This paper will provide readers with background information on sexual violence, and the importance of developing culturally-sensitive information and services. Additionally, it will offer readers with recommendations on how to begin effectively addressing this highly sensitive, yet neglected topic in the community. We hope this paper will be useful in helping you understand the issue, educate your colleagues, family and friends about the harms of sexual violence and work with them to identify ways to take action toward change.

¹ Introduction adapted from *Engaging Muslim Communities in Ending Sexual Exploitation*, available at: <http://heartwomenandgirls.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Toolkit-Ending-Sex-Exp.pdf>

² Miller, A. et al. "Stigma-Threat Motivated Nondisclosure of Sexual Assault and Sexual Revictimization: A Prospective Analysis." *Psychology of Women Quarterly*: March 2011 35: 119-128..

³ Abugideiri, Salma. "Domestic Violence: Muslim Communities: United States of America." *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*. Brill. May 2011. <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=ewic_COM-0690>

Sexual Violence 101: What is Sexual Violence?

All unwanted, nonconsensual acts - whether harassment, abuse, or assault, is considered sexual violence and morally abhorrent and a crime. The key word here is nonconsensual - which means that one of the two parties involved has not given consent to - or agreed to - what is happening. Put differently, one of the people involved is being forced to engage in the sexual activity without their permission.

There are many types of sexual violence, and we have included some important definitions for you below.

Sexual Harassment: unwanted sexual attention that one person inflicts on another. Can be verbal, non-verbal, or visual. Examples include:

- Subtle pressure for sexual activity
- Patting or pinching
- Deliberately brushing against one another
- 'friendly' arm around the shoulder
- sexually explicit photos or pictures hanging for others to see

Sexual abuse: an act of non-consensual sexual conduct* used by one person to exert power and control over another. Sexual conduct is any intentional touching or fondling by the victim or the accused, either directly or through clothing of the sex organs, anus, or breast of the victim or perpetrator, or any part of the body of a child under 13 years of age, for the purpose of sexual gratification or arousal of the victim and/or perpetrator. Examples include:

- Molesting
- Groping
- Fondling

Sexual Assault: any act of nonconsensual sexual penetration used by one person to exert power and control over another. Sexual penetration is any contact, however slight, between the sex organ or anus of one person by an object, the sex organ, mouth or anus of another person, or any intrusion, however slight, or any part of the body of one person or of any animal, including but not limited to cunnilingus, fellatio, or anal penetration. Examples include:

- Rape
- Attempted Rape
- Forced Oral Sex

Child Sexual Abuse: any sexual activity between an adult and a minor (under the age of 17). Examples include:

- Rape or attempted rape
- Touching the child's body or making the child touch someone else's
- Sexual contact with a child
- Someone watching or photographing a child in sexual situations
- Someone exposing his/her own body to a child
- Someone exposing a child to pornographic material

Consent: Both parties involved have agreed to the sexual encounter AND either party can decide AT ANY TIME that they no longer consent to continuing. Consenting to one behavior does not obligate one to consent to other behaviors. For example, giving permission to be kissed does not give permission for the other person to go beyond that, such as remove clothing. There are several situations when consent cannot happen (even if there is a yes):

- If one of the parties is a minor (under 17)
- If one of the parties is under the influence of a substance or alcohol
- If one of the parties is in a position of authority (teacher, doctor, law enforcement, etc)
- If one of the parties is mentally incapable

Now that we have explored a little bit about what sexual violence is, let's also briefly explore what sexual violence is not. First, sexual violence is not about the sex, but rather it is about the power and control an abuser wants to exert over his or her victim. Although it is commonly believed that those who commit sexual crimes are seeking sexual gratification, this is in fact not the case. Sexual assault is not at all about sexual gratification, but rather about the abuser exerting power over another. Second, in Muslim communities in particular, sexual violence is spoken about in the same context as zina (fornication or adultery). We will explore this concept a little more in depth further in the paper, but it is important to clearly distinguish between the act of zina and the act of sexual violence. While both are sins, they are drastically different by one main factor: zina is an act of *consensual sex* between two people, while sexual violence is the exact opposite, and is also a crime punishable by incarceration.

Sexual violence occurs against men, women, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) people, boys and girls. Perpetrators are usually in a position of power relative to the victim. Sexual violence often begins very subtly and with emotional manipulation. Most of the time, the perpetrator is not a stranger, but rather someone in the family or community, and works in such a way that he or she gains the victim's trust and makes subtle advances at times when the victim is most vulnerable. In fact, more than 93% of the time, the perpetrator is someone known to the victim. Coercion techniques may include physical force, but often include subtler techniques such as psychological intimidation, blackmail, guilt-trips, and sometimes even praise, rewards, and gifts. Perpetrators are incredibly creative and manipulative, especially in cases of child sexual abuse. Many times, they are so successful in gaining their victims trust, love and respect, during a period that is known as the grooming period, that victims are no longer able to identify that they are in fact being abused.

Frequency of Sexual Violence and its Effects on Survivors⁴

According to the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN), one in every six American women has been the victim of attempted or completed rape. About 3% of men experience attempted or completed rape. Still more disappointingly, about 15% of victims are under the age of 12, while 29% are ages 12-17 and 44% are under the age of 18. Seven percent of girls in grades 5-8 and 12% of girls in grades 9-12 report having been sexually abused. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that as high as 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused or assaulted by the age of 18. It is important to also note that sexual assault is also one of the

⁴ Adapted from *Engaging Muslim Communities in Ending Sexual Exploitation*, available at: <http://heartwomenandgirls.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Toolkit-Ending-Sex-Exp.pdf>

most underreported crimes in the United States - with more than 68% of crimes not ever being reported to law enforcement. As such, the above statistics do not include the many more who do not report their abuse to anyone, or who are unable to determine that they are, in fact, being abused. More than 90% of victims know their attacker, with family members constituting approximately one-third of all attackers.

Survivors of sexual violence can face a multitude of emotional, mental, social, physical, and spiritual after-effects of experiencing sexual violence. Victims are more likely to suffer from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder as compared with those who have not been abused. Specifically, victims of sexual violence are⁵:

- 3 times more likely to suffer from depression
- 6 times more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder
- 13 times more likely to abuse alcohol
- 26 times more likely to abuse drugs
- 4 times more likely to contemplate suicide.

There are several significant emotional and social results of being a survivor of sexual violence. The responses may be stronger in some survivors than others, depending on the individuals' life experiences. Responses include, but are not limited to: flashbacks, anger, inability to set boundaries, grieving, guilt, shame, blame, low self-esteem, inability to trust others, and difficulty in engaging in sexual activity.

Additionally, survivors of sexual violence often experience other physical effects long after an attack. Many of these are the body's reaction to the experience, while others are a result of the depression and low self-esteem that results from sexual violence. Possible physical conditions include sleeping disorders, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, self-harm/self-injury, suicide, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and somatic body memories (headaches, migraines, stomach difficulties, teeth grinding, unexplained pain, dizziness, and hot/cold flashes)⁶.

Barriers to Disclosing

As mentioned earlier, sexual violence is the most underreported crimes in the country - with nearly 70% of crimes never making it to law enforcement. Research shows that underreporting is even higher in communities of color. In our own anecdotal evidence, we would estimate those percentages being as high as 85% or even 90% of sexual assaults in the Muslim community do not make it to law enforcement. Before we can work toward prevention of these crimes, it is crucial to understand the barriers to reporting, and to work toward eliminating those barriers. The safer we can make it for survivors to report, the more perpetrators will be exposed and held accountable. As such, the barriers facing survivors include the following:

Shame & self-blame. The number one reason survivors do not report is that they feel shame. Often times, survivors feel as if they did something to provoke the assault and that they could have done something different to prevent it.

⁵ RAINN. *Who are the Victims? Breakdown by Gender and Age*. 2009. <http://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexual-assault-victims>

⁶ RAINN. *Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse*. 2009. <http://rainn.org/get-info/effects-of-sexual-assault/adult-survivors-of-childhood-sexual-abuse>

Victim-blaming. The second reason survivors do not report is that they fear they will be blamed for what happened. If they know that will be the first (or only) response from others, they may feel paralyzed from coming forward. Examples of victim-blaming: why was she dressed that way? What was she alone with him? What did she do to tempt him?

Perpetrator is someone the survivor loves and respects. Nearly 90% of the time, the perpetrator is known to the survivor - either a family member, or a community member, neighbor, etc. Victims often struggle with turning their loved ones into the police, or having them arrested and sent to jail.

Survivor fears the perpetrator. Another reason victims do not report is because they fear the perpetrator will cause further harm to them or their loved ones.

Fear of not being believed. The survivor is afraid no one will believe them, and in some cases has tried to tell someone and has not been believed. In other cases, the perpetrator has told them as such. This fear is especially greater when the perpetrator is in a position of leadership or enjoys fame. Often, when the perpetrator is a religious leader, that fear of not being believed is even greater, as many would immediately ask, “how can someone so religious do commit such a crime?”

Perpetrator is in a position of power or leadership. It is not easy to stand up to a perpetrator, let alone one who is in a position of power or leadership. Often times, perpetrators use their position as a way to manipulate their victims into remaining silent.

Legal process is long, exhausting and retraumatizing. During the investigation, survivors are often relentlessly questioned and find giving testimony to be retraumatizing. Moreover, the defense often tries to inflict the same kind of victim blaming the survivor has feared in order to paint the victim in a negative light.

Survivor is a child or doesn't identify as a victim. Many children do not have the language or tools to identify abuse when it is happening. Moreover, often times, survivors don't recognize the abuse because it's sandwiched in btw lots of love and devotion. How could someone they love and loves them really be abusing them? Or they don't recognize it because they're in denial that they are a victim.

In some families or communities, sex and sexual abuse are not talked about openly. As such, the survivor may feel it to be immodest to bring such issues up.

Survivors fear social consequences. Those who are a part of close-knit, cultural or faith communities may fear being outcasted, dividing the community, or never getting married.

Survivor comes from a community that values forgiveness and covering up of sins. There are faith communities that encourage victims of crimes to show mercy and forgive their perpetrators, or to protect them by not exposing their crimes.

Myths about Sexual Assault in the Muslim Community⁷

Among many of the important findings during our work in raising awareness on sexual violence, are that the myths and misinformation about sexual violence are rampant in the Muslim community. In this section, we hope to explore some of those myths and facts to clarify some of these myths.

1. It is immodest to talk openly about sex and sexual abuse.

It is not immodest to talk about sex and sexual abuse. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encouraged everyone to ask questions and take care of their bodies. Matters regarding the body were seen as natural and nothing to be ashamed of. The need to uphold privacy and modesty should not be at the expense of one's personal safety. Privacy can and should still be maintained even if one discloses.

2. If someone discloses that he/she has been sexually abused or sexually assaulted, no one will marry him/her because he/she is not a virgin.

Because the sexual purity is so highly regarded in the Muslim community, those who have been sexually abused/assaulted are (wrongly) stigmatized.

3. Sexual violence is a sin just like premarital sex and adultery.

The act of *zina* (premarital sex/sex outside of marriage) is the act of engaging in extramarital consensual sexual intercourse, while sexual violence is where consent is inherently absent.

4. Religious scholars do not sin or commit crimes.

Religious scholars are not infallible. While they are often held to a higher standard of moral code, they are human beings with flaws and are capable of committing both sins and crimes.

5. If you want God to forgive your transgressions, you should show mercy to those who transgressed against you.

In Islam, forgiveness for a crime is incumbent upon the perpetrator seeking forgiveness from the victim and the victim forgiving in return. Sexual violence is a crime against another individual, and it is up to the victim to forgive the act, not the community. The concept of forgiveness should not be manipulated to silence a victim and protect the accused.

6. If you were drunk or had sex before marriage and were sexually assaulted, you deserved it and God is punishing you.

This is another tactic that the community uses to shame and blame the victim. Yes, Islam does not permit alcohol, substance abuse or sex outside of marriage, but that does not justify the act of violence against another. Islamic tradition states that suffering is not tied to sin. Plenty of people suffer who never deserved it. Similarly, plenty of people do wrong and do not ever see the consequences of those actions in this world. This world is not a place of retribution, as Muslims believe the afterlife is for that.

⁷ Special credit to Ayesha Butt and Dr. Shabana Mir for their insight to these myths.

7. It is impossible for a person to sexually assault a married partner.

It is absolutely unlawful for a man to harm his wife in any way. In Islam, both spouses are granted rights and responsibilities. One of those rights is the right to sexual intercourse (for both spouses). Often times, this is misinterpreted to mean that the man has unlimited sexual access to his wife, and that consent isn't really needed. Islam highly values the institution of marriage, encourages both spouses to act with kindness, love and mercy with each other, and consent to sexual activity is very much a part of the equation. So while the rights to intimacy and sex exist, there is no implication whatsoever that the spouse may seek this right violently or forcefully.

8. If you wear hijab and dress modestly, you will be protected from sexual abuse and rape.

Hijab or any other clothing does not protect a woman from being sexually assaulted or abused. Often times, assailants have attacked fully-clothed women. Furthermore, the rates of sexual assault are not lower in much of the Muslim world, where women are fully covered every day.

9. If you do not date or have a boyfriend, you will be protected from sexual abuse and rape.

Although some sexual assault does occur between intimate partners, sexual assault can happen even if one does not date or have a boyfriend. The assailant can be anyone - a friend, neighbor, relative, or a stranger.

10. If you only interact with other females and only close male relatives, you can prevent from being sexually abused or raped.

Although an overwhelming number of assailants are men, women can be abusers too. There have been situations where a woman has assaulted another woman or girl. Similarly, many assailants have also been close male relatives, such as one's father, uncle or brother.

11. As long as a person wasn't raped (ie there was no penetration), any other abuse and molestation is not really that big a deal.

Many times the community minimizes other forms of sexual abuse other than rape. Often, child sexual abuse cases in particular do not involve penetration at all, but are still traumatic for the victims. All forms of sexual abuse and assault are crimes and are extremely traumatic for the victim involved.

12. You need 4 witnesses to prove sexual assault.

Many have incorrectly cited the need for there to be four witnesses. The act of *zina*, which is the act of engaging in extramarital consensual sexual intercourse, is what requires four witnesses, and the act of penetration must have been witnessed. The rationale behind this is to make it nearly impossible to prove adultery, practically speaking, because it is unlikely four witnesses would exist. This is also to prevent personal sexual sins from entering the public sphere, unless they are so egregious that at least four people have witnessed it. On the other hand, the same standard does not apply to sexual assault, a crime of physical and psychological violence. In these instances, sex is a weapon, not a mutual act of lust. Just as

assault, kidnapping, and other crimes do not require four witnesses, neither does sexual assault. Indeed, such a standard would be absurd and unjust, and those who seek to impose such a standard on victims of sexual assault are being unjust.

13. Everyone deserves 70 excuses. We should give perpetrators 70 excuses.

Some Muslims in the community have quoted the hadith of providing 70 excuses for a person. This narration of the Prophet Muhammad (S) states: "If a friend among your friends errs, make seventy excuses for them. If your hearts are unable to do this, then know that the shortcoming is in your own selves." An error is a mistake. Sexual violence is not about mistakes, but about a crime committed against another individual in which a person's inalienable rights were violated.

14. Exposing sexual assault or sexual abuse is giving more fuel to add to Islamophobes' fire.

Many blame the victims for coming forward. It is important to remember that the victim has every right to seek justice as the Qur'anic verse (4:148) mentions, "God does not like that evil be publicized except if one is wronged." Here, whether the crime is committed by an unknown person, or a leader in a higher position, the victim has every right to come forward and seek justice. Speaking up against an injustice is a part of Islam. Speaking up for those who are in weaker positions and have had an injustice occur against them is also mandated by God. The Quran says "Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor (4:135)." The Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said: "Fear God in your treatment of the weak, slaves, and women.

Rape Culture

Rape culture is when rape is prevalent and pervasive, sanctioned and maintained through fundamental attitudes and beliefs about gender, sexuality and violence. A culture in which society encourages, tolerates, excuses and maintains violence against women. Conditions for such a culture to exist include:

- Traditional gender roles that are enforced for what is viewed as acceptable masculine and feminine behavior.
- Sexuality is narrowly defined and dictated by men's desires and fantasies. Men cannot control their sexual impulses and it is the role of women to satisfy men. Women are viewed as the objects of male sexuality and are not supposed to enjoy sex for their own pleasure.
- Violence, particularly against women, is an acceptable means of dealing with social control and resolving conflict.

Second, rape is seen as inevitable and not preventable. Rape is an expression of the sexual norms of our culture - men as dominant over the insubordinate women.

Finally, rape is seen not as a cultural practice, but as an individual act between a man and a woman.

Historical Roots of Rape as a Form of Social Control

There is evidence that collective societies existed without rape some 3,500-5000 years ago. These were societies in which violence against women was not the norm and women were seen as equal in strength to men.

Yet, there has been a clear system of patriarchy within the past 500 Years. As such, many societies historically have been controlled by men, elevating the masculine role and diminishing the female role. The domination of men over property and wealth has been supported by the state going back to classical Greece and Rome. Women have been considered property. Additionally, the economic structure of capitalism renders everything a commodity to be bought and sold; this includes women and girls (pornography, trafficking).

Consequently, women have historically been reduced to the status of property - their father's before marriage, their husband's after marriage. If a woman was raped, it was seen as a crime against the male she belonged and if there was punishment for the rapist, money was paid to the male who owned the woman and the rapist could marry the woman he raped. Finally, the conquering of new land through war have included sanctioned rape of the real property, women and land, and of the conquered land, as we saw in Bosnia and Afghanistan.

Rape as a form of Contemporary Social Control

While rape has many historical roots in both peaceful and war-torn societies, there are many examples of it as a form of contemporary social control, using the fear of rape to keep women from sharing the world equally with men.

For example, many activities restricted or controlled for women, such as going out at night, going out alone, camping alone, going to a bar alone, freedom to dress as she chooses, and being in an all male environment. This includes warnings at a very young age from family and older adults about keeping themselves safe and recommendations to take Self defense classes. Put differently, women are encouraged to be proactive in protecting themselves from rape: from considering their attire, to dating, drinking, flirting, to time restrictions on leaving homes, and job choices eliminated.

The above social controls are further reinforced by society through rape myths. These myths hold women responsible for rape and encourage victim-blaming, such as:

- She turned him on
- Boys will be boys
- She went out with him
- She kissed him
- She shouldn't have been dressed like that

Secondly, these myths define conditions when it is understood (and expected) that women will be raped and therefore should be held responsible, such as:

- Being out late at night
- Drinking with strangers
- Being dress in provocative or sexy attire.

Finally, we would be remiss not to acknowledge that the media plays a significant role in promoting rape culture. In all forms of media, are three main messages about women:

1. The cause of male problems is the female: women manipulate men by taking them to the cleaners emotionally and financially. Women cheat and take advantage of otherwise nice guys.
2. Women resist sexual advances by men, but it is not to be taken seriously; women say no, but they really mean yes.
3. Women get mixed messages about being sexual: slut, shore, bitch, tease.

Likewise, there are a number of equally strong messages about men in media, such as:

1. Aggressive men, who are powerful and in control, are glamorized, glorified and rewarded.
2. Masculinity is identified with dominance, aggression, and lack of emotions other than anger.
3. The image of masculinity is reinforced through narrowly defining male emotions and placing a high value on competition and winning on all costs.
4. Feminine qualities expressed in men are deemed undesirable.
5. When boys don't conform to images portrayed by the media, they are ridiculed (i.e. called fag, punk, bitch, girl, wimp).

Rape is not Inevitable

Recently, more progressive sexual assault laws have expanded the definition of a victim and perpetrator, which means:

- Women can be rape victims of their husbands.
- Children can be rape victims by their parents or caretakers.
- Prostitutes can be rape victims
- Prior relationship between the victim and the perpetrator does not preclude the charge of acquaintance or date rape.
- Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender individuals can be rape victims
- Adolescents and children who commit rape are culpable for their actions.

Additionally, more public attention is now given for the crime of rape. For example, faith leaders, such as clergy and priests, are being punished for past and present sexual violence. Disclosure of the widespread use of rape during war is being seen as a war crime. Professionals who exploit their position of authority are being brought to trial on sex charges with loss of professional license and the ability to practice their profession. Finally, rape by professional and collegiate athletes and entertainers are making the headlines and being prosecuted.

What to do when Someone Discloses: A Step-by-step Guide

The act of reporting is one of the single most courageous acts ever. The revictimization is so overwhelming, the social, emotional and physical consequences can be so overwhelming, that many find it nearly impossible to report. Because of this, the likelihood of it being a false report are slim to none, with only about 2%-8% of reports being false. As such, we have included for you a list of things you can do when someone discloses to you that they have been sexually abused or assaulted.

- 1) **Believe them.** The first, and most important thing you can do for any survivor when they disclose to you that they have been abused or assaulted, is to believe them.
- 2) **Encourage professional support.** Meet them where they are rather than telling them what they should be doing. Of course, the most ideal course of action is to go to a hospital to get examined and go to the police to file a report. However, the survivor may not be mentally ready to do this just yet. Remember that being sexually assaulted is an act that strips the victim of his/her control - it is much more important to empower them to make their own decisions rather than making decisions for them. Of course, this is more applicable to older victims, and not young children.
- 3) **Report if you are a mandated reporter.** The guidelines for mandated reporting and who is a mandated reporter differ by state, but generally, mandated reporters are: teachers, principals and other school personnel, social workers, physicians, nurses and other health care professionals, law enforcement, clergy, and board members.
- 4) **Maintain the victim's confidentiality, especially if the victim is a minor.** Nobody needs to know the identity of the victim and there are crisis centers and advocates that are trained to help you continue to offer the individual support they need without having to reveal their identity to others.
- 5) **Offer victim-centric approaches.** If both the victim and perpetrator are part of the same institution, make sure the victim feels safe while the investigation proceeds. For example, the a victim in a school may need:
 - a. To request a schedule or classroom change
 - b. To request a specialized homework or exam schedule from their teachers without drawing attention to their situation
 - c. Additional counseling sessions

What you can do to Prepare your Institution to Properly Respond to such Allegations

- 1) **Create policies and procedures.** Bring best practices regarding policies such as making sure you have up-to-date manuals, security cameras, and other staff and facility policies in place that put in place preventative measures in your institutions. Make sure that your staff is reminded of these policies, and that these policies are readily available and accessible on your institution's website.
- 2) **Hire a counselor specially trained to address complaints.** If your institution already doesn't have a trained social services professional or counselor, consider hiring one. If

funding is an issue, consider sharing such a professional between two or more institutions or partnering with a local crisis center to serve this role until your institution is ready to bring one on full-time.

- 3) **Develop a procedure to collect anonymous reports.** Often times, people do not report abuse that they suffered or witnessed, out of fear of being penalized for coming forward with that information. Not having a procedure for anonymous reports can be a significant barrier for someone who has endured or witnessed something. Many universities are now developing a system where students can submit anonymous complaints to a confidential service.
- 4) **Develop a procedure to resolve complaints.** Once you receive a complaint, it is imperative to address it in a timely manner. Not considering it seriously or delaying a response can be very disheartening to a victim, and also gives the perpetrator the opportunity to continue to victimize others. Work with a crisis center or other trained professionals in developing an objective and fair process to address victim complaints in a way that still honors the privacy and needs of the victim.
- 5) **Have students and staff and faculty engage in annual trainings, as well as ongoing awareness and education efforts throughout the year.** It is important to note that simply having one training a year is not going to prevent sexual assault from occurring at your institution. Preventing sexual assault requires a shift in the organizational culture and tone, and it is necessary to have ongoing awareness and education efforts throughout the year, and not just at the beginning of the year.

We recognize that many Islamic institutions may not have the budget to incorporate all of these changes at once, and so we recommend an excellent way to fill the gap is to partner with their local rape crisis center and social services to help meet those needs while enough funding and resources are secured to bring such services in-house.

Resources

Hotlines

[National Sexual Assault Line](#) - 1-800-656-HOPE

[Rape Crisis Hotline](#) 1-888-293-2080

DCFS Number for Mandated Reporters - 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873)

Illinois Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline - 312-745-3401 toll-free number: 1-877-863-6338

Illinois Crisis Centers - List

www.icasa.org/crisiscenters.asp

National Crisis Centers - <http://www.nsvrc.org/organizations>

Statewide Organizations - <http://www.nsvrc.org/organizations/state-and-territory-coalitions>

Victim Support Organizations - <http://www.nsvrc.org/organizations/victim-survivor-support-organization>

National Organizations

National Sexual Violence Resource Center, www.nsvrc.org

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, rainn.org

Peaceful Families Project, peacefulfamilies.org

Community-based organizations (Chicago)

Rape Victim Advocates, rapevictimadvocates.org

Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault, icasa.org

Arab American Family Services, aafsil.org

Hamdard Center for Health and Human Services, hamdardcenter.org

Turning Point, turningpointmacomb.org

Toolkits and Other Resources

Engaging Muslim Communities In Ending Sexual Exploitation
<http://heartwomenandgirls.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Toolkit-Ending-Sex-Exp.pdf>

Talking to Kids about Sexual Violence: A Parent's Guide to Age-Appropriate Conversations
<http://bit.ly/ParentSVtalk>

HEART Women & Girls Publications, <http://heartwomenandgirls.org/publications/>