



A Qur'anic Contextualization of Mental Health Dynamics Involved In Domestic Violence

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Abstract

Domestic violence is a highly prevalent issue across the world. Consequently, prevention-models are emerging to combat this menace. The present study, therefore, aims to establish the role of religion in preventing domestic violence by grooming mentally healthy individuals and to contextualize this prevention approach within scriptural framework of the Holy text of Muslims, Holy Qur'an. It draws on data collected through interviews with victims of domestic violence identified during a survey in Kashmir and the Holy text of Muslims, the Quran. Interview transcripts were analyzed using qualitative method (axial coding by Corbin and Strauss) in order to establish its causes. Once the causes were established, the Qur'anic text was thoroughly examined to identify the verses which address the causes of domestic violence. Thereafter each identified verse was contextualized within the prevention of domestic violence context. The thematic analysis of the data revealed the following categories of the causal factors of domestic violence, 'perpetrator's characteristics', 'victim's characteristics', 'communication factors', and 'cultural factors'. These causal factors reveal a spectrum of personality and mental health issue among the perpetrators and victims of domestic violence respectively. Personality issues like elements of narcissism are found in perpetrators whereas elements of depression like learned helplessness are found in victims. Therefore, identification of the relevant Qur'anic verses and their contextualization within interpersonal relationships provided ways to address each of these causal factors of domestic violence. The holy text of the Qur'an provides for prevention of domestic violence across various levels, individual and societal. However, it emphasizes primary prevention of domestic violence through grooming well-balanced personalities with desirable social and interpersonal skills who are less likely to involve in any kind of interpersonal violence and in case of victims, the Qur'an exhorts people to have a liberating set of cognitive beliefs, like a pro-active approach towards life which makes it less likely for the victims to land in depression. Therefore, the present study can help in designing interventions for prevention of domestic violence for Muslim population based on their holy text, the Quran.

Keywords: Scriptural understanding, the Qur'an, causal factors, qualitative analysis, prevention models.

Abstrak

Keganasan rumah tangga adalah isu yang sering berlaku di seluruh dunia. Akibatnya, model pencegahan muncul untuk memerangi ancaman ini. Oleh itu, kajian ini adalah bertujuan untuk menetapkan peranan agama dalam mencegah keganasan rumah tangga dengan mengurus individu yang sihat secara mental dan untuk pendekatan pencegahan secara konteks ini dalam rangka kerja tulisan suci teks suci umat Islam, Al-Quran. Ini

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menggunakan data yang dikumpulkan melalui temu bual bersama mangsa keganasan rumah tangga yang dikenal pasti semasa tinjauan di Kashmir dan teks suci umat Islam, Al-Quran. Transkrip temu bual dianalisis dengan menggunakan kaedah kualitatif

(pengaturcaraan aksial oleh Corbin dan Strauss) untuk membuktikan penyebab keganasan rumah tangga. Setelah penyebabnya dibuktikan, teks Al-Quran diperiksa secara menyeluruh untuk mengenal pasti ayat-ayat yang membahas penyebab keganasan rumah tangga. Setiap ayat yang dikenal pasti dikontekstualisasikan dalam konteks pencegahan keganasan rumah tangga. Analisis tematik data menunjukkan faktor penyebab keganasan rumah tangga dikategorikan sebagai, 'ciri pelaku', 'ciri-ciri mangsa', 'faktor komunikasi', dan 'faktor budaya'. Faktor-faktor penyebab ini menunjukkan spektrum keperibadian dan masalah kesihatan mental di kalangan pelaku dan mangsa keganasan rumah tangga masing-masing. Masalah keperibadian seperti unsur narsisme terdapat pada pelaku sedangkan unsur kemurungan seperti ketidakupayaan untuk mempelajari terdapat pada mangsa. Oleh itu, pengenalan ayat-ayat Al-Quran yang relevan dan konteksnya dalam hubungan interpersonal menyediakan cara untuk menangani setiap faktor penyebab keganasan rumah tangga ini. Teks suci Al-Quran melengkapi pencegahan keganasan rumah tangga di pelbagai peringkat, individu dan masyarakat. Walau bagaimanapun, ia menekankan pencegahan utama keganasan rumah tangga melalui penyediaan personaliti yang seimbang dengan kemahiran sosial dan interpersonal yang cenderung untuk tidak terlibat dalam sebarang jenis keganasan interpersonal dan dalam kes mangsa, Al-Quran menganjurkan orang untuk memiliki kumpulan yang bebas dari kepercayaan kognitif, seperti pendekatan pro-aktif terhadap kehidupan yang menjadikan mangsa cenderung mengalami kemurungan. Oleh itu, kajian ini dapat membantu dalam membangunkan intervensi bagi pencegahan keganasan rumah tangga untuk penduduk Muslim berdasarkan teks suci, Al-Qur'an.

Katakunci: *Pemahaman tulisan suci, al-Qur'an, Faktor penyebab, pengaturcaraan analisa, model pencegahan*

Preventing domestic violence: A Qur'anic perspective

Domestic Violence is a universal phenomenon; it exists across regions and across cultures. According to a World Health Organization (2013) report, the global prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence among all ever-partnered women was 30.0% (95% confidence interval CI=27.8%-32.2%). Therefore, recognized as the serious phenomenon, domestic violence has received enough academic attention. Researchers have studied this phenomenon at various levels.

Different theories of domestic violence have been propounded in order to establish the causal factors of domestic violence. For example, the *biological theories*, *Individual Psychopathology theory*, *Couple and Family Interaction Theory*, *Social learning and Development theory*, *Societal Structure Theory* (Wolfe & Jaffe, 1999; and Taylor, 2006). Besides, empirical studies also reveal various demographic, personality and social factors which act as risk or protective factors of domestic violence (Capaldi, 2012, and Anderson, 1997).

Researchers have also worked to design various prevention models in order to address the issue of domestic violence at various levels.

Examples of prevention-models are, *3-level model of prevention*, *public health approach*, and *social-ecological model*. Appelt & Kaselitz, (2000) provide a 3 level model of prevention: *primary prevention*, *secondary prevention* and *tertiary prevention*. On the other hand, Walden and wall (2014) explored the *public health model* to the prevention of violence against women which aims at primary prevention. Yet an understanding of gender-based violence as having multiple causes is best conceptualized in a social-ecological model, demonstrating the interactive nature of a range of various causes of domestic violence (Walden & Wall, 2014).

However the question relevant to this study is, *what is the role of religion in preventing domestic violence?* The evidence regarding this issue is mixed. The paradoxical role of religion as both a source of assistance and a barrier to women surviving domestic violence has been established. Although religious institutions are a resource for emotional comfort and provide practical assistance, they may also perpetuate silence (Pyles, 2007). It is actually because of the variation in the understanding of the religious scripture (Buzawa, 2012, p-62).

Buzawa (2012) gives a positive outlook which is relevant today in terms of using religion

to prevent domestic violence. She writes, “also we do need to stress that religion can and has been used to try to prevent domestic violence”.

It, therefore, shows that the correct understanding of the Scripture can go a long way in preventing domestic violence among the faithful. Besides religion can be a protective factor for domestic violence has been established through empirical research. For instance, Elison, Trinitapoli, Anderson and Johnson (2007) explored the relationship between religious involvement and intimate partner violence and they found that religious involvement is correlated with reduced levels of domestic violence. The study therefore aims to identify the causal factors of domestic violence, and then contextualize relevant Qur'anic verses within the prevention of domestic violence context.

Methods: Participants

Married women aged 15 and above, and living across the rural and urban areas of Kashmir division of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, were screened to identify the victims of domestic violence. Multi-stage cluster sampling was used to select households at various levels across the six districts of Kashmir province (Srinagar, Ganderbal, Budgam, Anantnag, Baramulla and Shopian), which yielded the sample size as 1,938. Out of 1,938, 146 women were identified as the victims of domestic violence, experiencing verbal, emotional, physical and economic abuse at the hands of their husbands. In order to explore the dynamics of causal factors of domestic violence, an interview schedule was administered to the victims.

Interview schedule

It started with an open ended question which asked the victims what they thought was the cause of domestic violence. It then probed about other commonly accepted causes like stress, in-laws' influence, disparity between couples, stereotypical gender-roles, faulty communication, perpetrators' personality characteristics and victims' lack of ambitions. It also contained questions to assess the degree of victim's empowerment in decision-making, and the extent of control they exercise over their lives.

Procedure

In order to establish the causal factors of domestic violence, the interview transcripts of the victims of violence were analyzed using the Corbin and Strauss's coding method. The themes which emerged from the transcripts were put into categories according to the commonalities which they shared. The process of identifying the themes was continued until saturation was achieved with respect to the data, that is, to a point from where no new theme emerged.

Thereafter, in order to find the Qur'anic prescription for each causal factor of domestic violence, a thorough reading of Qur'an was carried out and the relevant verses were identified. Afterward each relevant Qur'anic verse was contextualized within prevention of domestic violence context.

Ethical considerations

Owing to the sensitivities involved in studying a phenomenon like domestic violence, elaborate precautions were taken to ensure the safety of the victims being interviewed and to fulfill the international standards for researching violence against women. For instance the survey was introduced as a survey for woman's health to the community however, after that a disclosure about the actual intent of the survey was done and consent of the interviewee was sought. Confidentiality was maintained to such an extent that no identity details of the interviewee were asked in the questionnaire, for instance respondent's name was not asked. Precautions were also taken in case of presence of anyone else from the respondent's family who could have posed a threat to the respondent's safety for instance, dummy questionnaires asking questions about physical and mental well-being were prepared to ward off dangers of that sort.

Analysis: Causes of domestic violence

Analysis of interview transcripts of the victims of domestic violence reveals that domestic violence is a very complex phenomenon. It is a result of interplay of multiple factors, for instance, it could be that individual psychopathology gets legitimized by the societal ideologies to condone domestic violence. However, in this study the

specific causes which emerged as causes of domestic violence in Kashmir are classified in following categories, 'perpetrator's characteristics', 'victim's characteristics', 'communication factors', and 'cultural factors' (Gibbs, 2002). These categories subsume various themes. However the classification of the themes into categories is based on *similarities* that they share and on the *frequency* with which they co-occur. For instance "perpetrator's characteristics" category subsumes themes like *anger*, *dominance* and *lack of commitment*. Category of "victim's characteristics" subsume themes like *learned helplessness*; "communication factors" category subsumes yelling, shouting; and "cultural factors" category subsumes themes like, in-laws hostilities and gender discrimination.

Perpetrator's characteristics and their Qur'anic Prescription:

Characteristics of the perpetrators revealed during this study were: *anger*, *dominance* and *lack of commitment* or *loyalty*.

a. *Anger*: Anger was abusive husband's commonly used behavior toward their wives. Anger is captured by the victim's statements, like, "My husband gets mad at me for petty reasons, it is very frequent for him to yell and smash things at me".

The Qur'anic prescription for Anger Management: The Qur'an says, "*Those who give in prosperity and adversity, and those who restrain anger and those who forgive people, God love the doers of good.*" (The Quran, 3:134). In this verse, three attributes of the ones whom Allah loves are mentioned. Among these attributes, the two attributes are relevant for the present discussion, these are: restraint of anger and forgiving people. As far as the restraint of

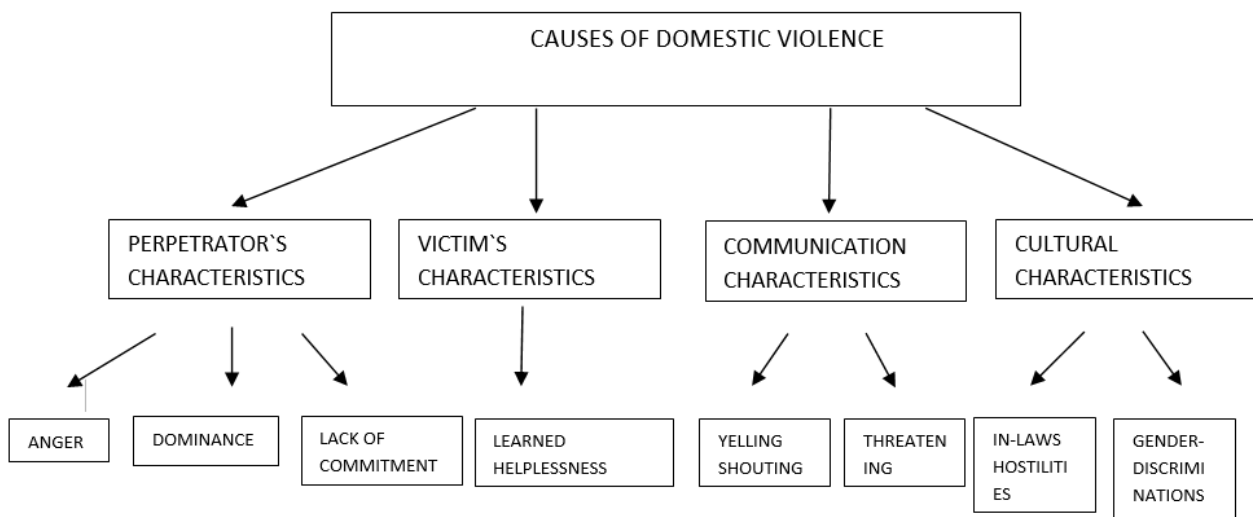


Figure 1 showing the categories which emerged while coding the interview transcripts

The Qur'anic verses about the prevention of causal conditions of domestic violence

Following sections contain the brief description of the causes of domestic violence and contextualization of Qur'anic verses to prevent these causes.

anger is concerned, the Arabic word used for restraint in this verse is "*qazm*" which linguistically means to hold something in order to prevent it from spilling over. Therefore, controlling over the top expression of anger is considered to be praiseworthy in this verse. It is apparently a simple act of restraint but acknowledging its difficulty, Qur'an declares God's love as its reward.

It is beautiful how the Holy Qur'an is acknowledging the basic human emotion of anger, it acknowledges that anger is natural and

that the humans will be angry but it exhorts man to control it. Now what makes it even more beautiful is what follows. Usually the emotions which are suppressed may hurt the person suppressing them, because he does not give a vent to them which helps to release tension in some cases. The Holy Qur'an does not only say restrain your anger but it goes on to say forgive the people. That means replace the grudges that you hold towards people with positive emotions of forgiveness. So when negative emotions (mad at people) are replaced with the positive ones (forgiving people), the result is inner peace.

Overall the kind of personality that the Holy Qur'an is glorifying is that of control over anger and forgiving people, these attributes of a person are true for his various roles and across situations. For example, it holds true for a husband toward his wife or vice versa. The data reveals, if the wife has irritated the husband, the husband usually gives an over the top reaction to his irritation which initially is expressed in words and in extreme cases in actions (physical abuse). Imam Raazi (1149-1210), a famous exegete of the Holy Qur'an, writes that the restraint of anger, mentioned in the above-quoted verse, is to be exercised both verbally and physically, therefore, addressing the two critical forms of domestic abuse, verbal abuse and physical abuse.

- b. *Dominance*: Another cause for perpetrating domestic abuse by the husbands that emerged during analysis was a deep-rooted idea of male-dominance, an idea that men are justified to behave in the ways they wish toward their wives because somehow men believe that they are superior and therefore, entitled to dominance over women. This theme was captured in the victim's statements whose husband believed that, "*Women are nothing, but for the service of men*".

The Qur'anic prescription for the delusion of dominance: The Qur'an says, "*And the slaves of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon earth with humility and when ignorant people address them (harshly) they say (words of) peace.*" (The Qur'an, 25:63). In the above verse, the first quality of the bondsmen of the Most Merciful is described as humility. The Arabic word used for humility in the above verse is "HOWN" which means softness, gentleness, kindness. So the qualification for

being the bondsmen of the Most Merciful, which is a great title given to a person, is being humble; this humility is so deeply rooted in these people that it is even reflected in their walk. Note the choice of the name for Allah in this verse ("Ar Rahman"- the Most Merciful) points toward the attribute of Divine mercy, and therefore enjoins the bondsmen of this Merciful Lord to be humble and merciful.

An inference made from the above-verse is that if humility is observed in marital relations, from both sides, it can solve most of the issues of a disturbed marriage. The data also reveals that the issues mostly arise in marriages because the couple's ego gets hurt. For instance, sometimes the husband may think his wife is belittling him or not giving him the privileges he thinks he is entitled to. So when the baseline nature is humility, the ego clashes are less likely to take place between the spouses which are a common cause of marital conflict. Furthermore, it is logical that the marriage can be fixed by fixing the persons involved. Therefore, the attributes that the Qur'an seeks to instil in humans result in grooming healthy personalities and thereby, healthy interpersonal relations are the result.

- c. *Lack of Commitment*: A more serious cause of domestic violence was lack of commitment and loyalty in husbands. It was captured in alarmingly growing rates of extra-marital affairs. If a frequency estimate is considered then 7 out of 65 cases of domestic abuse (that is, nearly 11%) cited extra-marital affair of husbands as a reason for domestic abuse.

The Quranic prescription for lack of commitment: The Qur'an says, "*Men are protectors and maintainers of women, as God has given some of them advantage over others, and because they spend out of their wealth. The good women are obedient, guarding what God would have them guard.*" (The Quran, 4:34). Ironically the above-quoted verse of the Qur'an is one of the most frequently misused verse to justify unchecked male authority and dominance over women. However, linguistic analysis of the word "qawaam" used in the verse dispels the confusion. The Arabic word "Qawaam"

means “caretaker”, “protector”, “custodian” and “one who is continually committed”. However the only translation of the word “qawaam” for those who use scripture to justify abusing women is authority.

Moreover in context with the lack of commitment as a cause of domestic abuse, the word “Qawaam” seems relevant as it also means one who is continually committed. This indicates that men in general have to be the protectors, caretakers, custodians and committed toward women in every relation including the spousal relation as well. So the holy Qur'an exhorts men to be responsible and committed toward women.

Victim's characteristics and the Qur'anic prescription:

The victim's characteristic which stood out as the most obvious factor among the victims of domestic violence was learned helplessness- a psychological state in which a person passively accepts his/her deplorable condition and makes no attempts to come out of it. The data reveals that most of the victims of domestic abuse had passively accepted their state, and thought that they were destined to suffer in this way. This attitude was reflected in a very typical oft-repeated Kashmiri proverb, which appeared frequently in the interviews with the victims, its translation goes as, “*In-laws place is like a grave, whether big or short, there is no escape*”. It is not that women were only feeling helpless, but this helplessness took a great toll on their physical and mental well-being. For instance, it was seen that the health of these women was falling, their suicidal ideation was high, and their productivity toward society was bare minimum. In fact they had become a liability for the society. The Qur'anic prescription for the Victim's Characteristics: The Qur'an says, “*Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.*” (The Quran, 13:11). In this verse, the sense of personal responsibility is conveyed. Even if it is Allah, who is the ultimate doer of things but it is conveyed that Allah will not change the condition of people until they do not change what is in themselves. The words used for what is to be

changed “within” individuals are “*bi anfusihim*”, which carry a beautiful message, that is, for correcting our state, we need to correct what lies “within” ourselves. Therefore, the victims of domestic abuse too need to correct their interior in order for their conditions to improve.

Communication characteristics and the Qur'anic prescription

Communication patterns among the couples were seen as critical in determining the dynamics of their marital relation. The couples in abusive relations mostly had faulty communication patterns with their abusive partners reflected in being poor listeners, yelling, shouting and using faulty techniques like sarcasm. This pattern of communication among the abusive couples was captured in statements like, “*Whenever my husband is angry, he loses control over his tongue, and speaks out a venom which is not bearable*”

The Qur'anic prescription for the communication characteristics: The Qur'an says, “*Go both of you to Pharaoh, indeed he has transgressed. But speak to him nicely/gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or have some fear*” (The Qur'an, 20:43-44). In this verse Allah is asking Moses and his brother to give His message to Pharaoh nicely and gently. This is one of the most cunning kings to rule this planet, who murdered thousands of kids yet he deserves to be addressed softly. So how can our spouses deserve to be yelled at? This verse carries a guidance and wisdom for the faithful, which is, it is always wise to be soft and gentle.

Interpersonal characteristics and the Qur'anic prescription

The interpersonal characteristics were reflected in terms of in-laws' hostilities toward their daughter-in-laws. Though In-laws hostilities were categorized as interpersonal characteristics, this issue has cultural underpinnings as well. The in-laws hostilities ranged from sarcastic remarks to creating tensions between the couples. Many of the victims reported that it were their in-laws who were the cause of spousal violence. Faulty assumptions and a sense of insecurity were the common causes that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts with the victims.

The Qur'anic prescription for cultural characteristics: The Qur'an says, "*O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule (another) people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule (other) women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by (offensive) nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after (one's) faith. And whoever does not repent-then it is these who are wrongdoers.* (The Quran, 49:11). At other place, the Qur'an says, "*O you who have believed, avoid much (negative) assumption. Indeed, some assumption is sin. And do not spy or backbite each other. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead? You will detest it. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is accepting of repentance and Merciful.*" (The Quran, 49:12)

The above-quoted verses belong to Chapter (Surah) 49 of the Holy Qur'an, namely Al-Hujraat. The theme of this Surah is teaching social etiquette to a newly formed Muslim community. It involves the etiquettes of many interpersonal transactions among people which are important for maintaining healthy social relations. Verse 11 of the Surah, refrains the believing community from ridiculing, insulting and calling each other with offensive nicknames. When it says don't ridicule, the reason it gives is that may be the people you are ridiculing are better than you. Therefore, the feeling that others maybe better than ourselves turns out to be an effective deterrent against demeaning or belittling them.

Furthermore the next verse refrains people from making negative assumptions, spying and backbiting. What is interesting is that the Holy Qur'an addresses an issue as subtle as making assumptions about others. If anything grave happens in social relations, it usually starts with making a wrong assumption about a person. It is, therefore, this habit of assuming that others have bad intentions which eventually leads to our ill-behaviour toward them.

Furthermore, spying is again a common feature in marital relations which leads to wrong assumptions and therefore, spoils the relations. It is common that a mother-in-law spies her daughter-in-law and vice-versa. It is also common between spouses that they spy each

other, for instance, checking each other's mobile phone in their absence. This implies trust deficit, which is surely not a sign of a healthy relation.

Moreover, something very common in some cultures is backbiting. Backbiting is essentially saying something at the back of a person which he/she may not like if said in his/her presence. (Alusi, 1978). In interpersonal relations, backbiting is a very harmful habit which can spoil relations badly. By strongly opposing backbiting, the Qur'an helps its adherents to refrain from this harmful act.

Structural inequalities and the Qur'anic prescription

One of the factors that lie at the core of Domestic Violence is the structural inequalities in terms of gender which are prevalent in societies. It is somehow assumed that men are superior to women and therefore, they have an authority over them.

The Qur'anic prescription for Structural Inequalities: The Qur'an says, "*Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer- We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward (in the Hereafter) according to the best of what they used to do.*" (The Quran, 16:97)

While people make distinctions on the basis of gender, the holy Qur'an exhorts in this verse that the criterion for living a good life and for achieving a reward in the hereafter is doing righteous deeds, and not gender. Therefore, the Qur'an does not set gender as its criterion for achieving the highest bliss, the heaven. Rather the criterion is doing righteous deeds. One explanation for this verse goes that the acceptability of good deeds is equal from both men and women.

It implies that when God did not make distinctions on the basis on gender for the ultimate good, that is, the heaven, it is quite unfortunate that people use gender to subjugate women.

Discussion

In order to figure out the role of religion in prevention of domestic violence, religious scriptures need to be examined. Examination of the Qur'anic text, a sacred book for Muslims,

reveals that it provides prevention mechanisms for domestic violence which are very adequate and are also in tune with different prevention-models designed to address this issue. For instance, Qur'an provides different stages of prevention for domestic violence. These stages are primary, secondary and tertiary, which is in tune with three-level prevention model. However, it emphasizes primary prevention through grooming well-balanced personalities with desirable social and interpersonal skills who are unlikely to involve in any kind of interpersonal violence. Furthermore, it also furnishes teachings to prevent domestic violence across various levels, that is, individual and societal, which is in tune with the socio-ecological model. Moreover, as the socio-ecological model states there is an interaction among various social systems and the individual (Walden & Wall, 2014) and by implication if any social evil is to be fought, all components of this interacting system need to be addressed, that is, the individual as well as the society. Qur'an also provides an all-encompassing prevention mechanism. It addresses the issues at individual and at societal levels. Moreover, the Qur'anic view of prevention can be more effective because of the religious authority it holds among Muslims.

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