

Punishment, Child Abuse, and Mandated Reporting

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Abstract

Child abuse may take multiple forms, such as neglect and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. In the US, physical abuse is considered a crime and, according to the law, must be reported by those working in numerous professions, among them that of mental health. Failing to report child abuse can have legal and professional repercussions. Corporal punishment (CP), a common disciplinary practice in many cultures and households, may be difficult to distinguish from child abuse. Additionally, perspectives on corporal punishment vary among cultures and may find justifications in religious traditions. Therefore, addressing it in clinical practice is surrounded by ethical and professional challenges.

This paper explores the challenges and ideals of addressing CP and physical abuse according to the perspectives of Islam and professional clinical practice, with a particular focus on the American Muslim context. After exploring the Islamic worldview on parenting and CP, the paper will explore ethical dilemmas facing clinicians with regard to reporting child abuse and offer practical recommendations informed by the Islamic tradition and the existing literature on the topic.

Keywords: Islam, child abuse, mandated reporting, corporal punishment, parenting, ethics

Introduction

Parenting and child-rearing is a task laden with responsibility, joy, and challenges. Across cultures, various disciplinary approaches are central to raising and educating children. Despite research showing the negative impacts of physical disciplinary approaches such as corporal punishment (CP), they remain prevalent and extremely common across nations and cultures. CP practices (e.g., spanking, slapping, smacking, hitting, and pinching) are potentially injurious, and the relevant literature is replete with cases ranging from injury to death, not to mention psychological injuries. Nonetheless, parents and teachers may justify its usage as effective and religiously or culturally sanctioned.

This paper explores the challenges and ideals of addressing CP and physical abuse according to the perspectives of Islam and professional clinical practice, with a particular focus on the American Muslim context. This topic lies at the interface of culture, mental health, religion, and law. After examining its prevalence globally and in Muslim communities, as well as exploring international efforts to prevent violence against children, the paper will look at the relationship among CP, child abuse, and faith. It will then present the Islamic perspective on CP along with some of the ethical dilemmas facing clinicians with regard to their legal obligation to report suspected child abuse. Finally, two case vignettes will be offered to present practical recommendations informed by the Islamic tradition and the existing literature on the topic.

The Prevalence of Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment, a physical form of child discipline, may be defined as a form of training aimed at reinforcing desired habits, developing self-control, establishing behavioral boundaries, and cultivating positive social and religious conduct (WHO, 2006; VandenBos, 2015). It includes the use of physical punishment and force, such as spanking, to cause pain – but not injury – for disciplinary purposes (VandenBos, 2015). If CP becomes too harsh, it may cross the limits and be considered abusive punishment, which may be defined as the “use of excessive physical force to discipline a child that results in bodily injury, including noticeable marks, bruises, cuts, or welts; such punishment includes beating, burning, or tying up a child” (VandenBos, 2015, p.5).

This type of punishment is a rampant global phenomenon. A large data set from low- and middle-income countries showed that three in four children aged between two and fourteen have experienced violent discipline, half of which was physical in nature. Seventeen percent of children experience severe forms of punishment (UNICEF, 2010). In the United States, despite continuous debates and decreasing rates of approval, previous studies show that the majority of parents use some form of CP for disciplinary purposes (Fontes, 2005; Brundage, 2008; Straus & Donnelly, 2017).

Studies from around the Muslim world indicate an alarming prevalence of violence toward children. A study conducted in Saudi Arabia indicated that 20-45% of Saudi children, primarily between the ages of 12-18, are consistently exposed to violence, predominantly physical violence. Children in the study were exposed to slapping and violent beating (Khuja, 2011; Al-Zahrani, 2004). In the United Arab Emirates, a national study found that 6 out of 10 acts of violence toward children – pinching, hair-pulling, kicking, and shoving – happen at home and are done by other family members. A full 25% of the children reported feeling frightened in their own homes.

Emotional neglect also seemed to be a prevalent phenomenon (Al-Khatib, 2013, as cited in Awaisha, 2017). In Algeria, a national report published in 2012 revealed that 86% of children experience some form of emotional or physical violence. A study that included 300 parents indicated that the majority of them use CP; however, mild to moderate CP dominated the sample. Algerian forensic reports in 2012 revealed that nearly 6,000 children were victims of violence that resulted in physical injury and/or death in a few cases (Awaisha, 2017). In Pakistan, similar CP-related deaths have been reported, as well as CP victims committing suicide (Holden & Ashraf, 2016). In Egypt, nearly 90% and 40% of children in a study sample experienced beating at home and at school, respectively (Zayed, 2007, as cited in Muhammad et al., 2018).

Among the 33 countries surveyed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) regarding household disciplinary practices, only the majority of parents from Muslim-majority Syria and Sierra Leone considered physical punishment as necessary in child-rearing. Nonetheless, violent physical discipline was commonly practiced among households from all the countries surveyed, with the highest prevalence occurring among children aged 5-9. Yemen, one of the countries that ranked highest globally with regard to violent discipline, had rates of psychological aggression exceeding 90% and physical punishment as high as 86% (psychological aggression refers to shouting, yelling, or calling a child offensive names). In a study that compared data from six European countries, Turkey and Lithuania ranked the highest with regard to the use of physical punishment (Durivage et al., 2015). In Iran, a systematic review conducted during 2014 revealed that the cumulative prevalence of child physical abuse in both genders was 43.5% (Mohammadi et al., 2014). The above figures are troubling and raise many questions regarding the possible reasons as well as the consequences of such a prevalent practice.

Global and National Efforts to Protect Children Against Violence

In an attempt to protect children's rights, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, which later became one of the most widely ratified human rights conventions. The CRC stipulates comprehensive measures to protect children against all forms of violence and abuse, including "violent or other cruel or degrading forms of discipline" (UNICEF, 2010; United Nations OHCHR, 1990). It is noteworthy that the United States is the only country that, to date, has not ratified it.

Among the CRC's recommendations is to support the protection of children through legislation and education. There is a strong global push for legally prohibiting all forms of CP for children. As of 2021, 62 countries had adopted this recommendation. This is a significant increase from the total of 29 countries in 2010. Corporal punishment in schools, in particular, is legally banned

in 135 countries as of 2021 (End Corporal Punishment, n.d.). Most Muslim-majority countries banned it only in specific settings. UNICEF collaborated with Muslim governments and religious authorities to promote children's well-being through research, education, and training. Parenting-training programs were delivered in Jordan, Yemen, and other Muslim countries. UNICEF launched multi-disciplinary working groups with religious authorities in Egypt, Iran, and Mauritania. These efforts yielded landmark publications and fatwas by these reputable authorities emphasizing children's rights to be protected against violence (Robinson, 2010; UNICEF, 2010).

The United States' Child Protective Services (CPS), a governmental agency located in each state, is dedicated to protecting the rights and needs of children. The agency has been the source of much scrutiny: criticized for tampering with parents' autonomy to raise their children, as well as being accused of not doing enough to protect children, as highlighted in multiple sensationalized cases over the past several decades.

To better understand the current American system, one needs to explore the child welfare system's history. Child abuse and maltreatment have been an area of social concern since the late 1800s. Prior to 1874, no laws mandated the humane treatment of children and they had no rights. Thus, child maltreatment was rampant, and they were often exploited by working long hours in factories. In 1874, the case of Mary Ellen McCormack, a 10-year-old girl who was beaten daily by her foster mother, attracted attention. The concerned neighbors were unable to find any agency that would help her. At that point Etta Angell Wheeler, her assigned investigator, sought help from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). The founder hired an attorney to take this case to the New York State Supreme Court, which freed Mary Ellen by placing her in a residential facility. Later on, Ms. Wheeler adopted her. This case led to the founding of the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) in 1874, the world's first child protective organization (Markel, 2009).

In various states, for the next 90 years the SPCC remained the leading non-governmental agency advocating for protecting children from maltreatment. The early 1900s gave rise to juvenile courts, and by the 1960s the government assumed this task. During this time, doctor training programs included training on how to identify child abuse and neglect. Child abuse-reporting laws, introduced in 1963, mandated that medical professionals report their suspicions. State registries and reporting hotlines to track incidents of abuse began to be logged. Over the years, the list of mandated reporters was expanded to include the police, school staff, the clergy, mental health providers, medical providers, and district attorneys (Myers, 2008).

In 1974, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act established state agencies to investigate cases of suspected child maltreatment. In 2018, the Family First Prevention Act was passed, providing funding for preventive programs to reduce the incidence of child removal and foster care placement (Family First Act, 2019). Preventive or community response programs are designed to help reduce family stressors and the number of referrals to CPS. Today, CPS agencies include various units such as the reporter hotline, the investigative unit, emergency children's services, preventive programs, foster care programs, and adoption services.

Understanding Child Abuse: Prevalence, Definitions, Impact

The task of assessing the nature of physical discipline is rather challenging, as no single benchmark differentiates child abuse from physical discipline (Coleman et al., 2010). Various factors come into play, including parental background; psychosocial stressors; and the child's mental, physical, and emotional states, along with age and size. The fear of harsh consequences, among them the cancellation of parental authority, the potential removal of the child, and the disruption of the family unit, also impacts the decision to report a suspected incident, especially among people of color. Mandated reporters often fear filing reports, despite the risk of loss of licensure. Therefore, it is important to discuss child abuse insofar as it enables clinicians to identify what it is not.

Nationwide, in 2018 it was reported that CPS processed 4.3 million allegations of abuse or neglect involving 7.8 million children. Nearly 56% of these reports warranted investigation by CPS, and 4.8% of the children were involved in cases that indicated abuse. Overall, about 1% of US children were determined to have suffered maltreatment. Among the investigated cases, 22.9% of victims and 1.9% of non-victims (such as siblings) were placed in foster care (Slack & Berger, 2021).

There are three main types of child abuse, namely, physical, sexual, and neglect. *Physical abuse* is the intentional infliction of "serious physical injury," such as shaking, beating, burning, biting, or hitting with objects. This also includes circumstances in which parents would allow others to abuse their children. Physical abuse often leaves evidence in the form of bruising, scars, burns, and broken/fractured bones. *Sexual abuse* includes "incest, rape, obscene sexual performance, fondling a child's genitals, intercourse, sodomy, and any other contact such as exposing a child to sexual activity, or commercial sexual exploitation such as prostitution of a minor or production of pornographic materials involving a minor" (NYC Administration for Children's Services, n.d.). *Child neglect* is defined as "the failure of a parent or caretaker to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm." Neglect may include:

[The] failure to support a child's educational needs either by excessive unexcused absences, by failing to communicate with a child's educational needs despite the school's outreach to the parent; by failing to provide adequate food, clothing, or shelter; by failing to provide medical or mental health care; by leaving a child alone without adequate supervision; by leaving a child with someone that does not have the capacity to appropriately supervise or protect the child, or without planning for the provision for food, clothing, education, or medical care; or by subjecting a child to humiliation, fear, verbal abuse, or extreme criticism, exposing a child to family violence or caregiver substance abuse that can compromise the well-being of the children. (NYC Administration for Children's Services, n.d.)

Child abuse can produce short-term and long-term effects. Physical abuse can impact brain functioning, including the ability to process emotions, memory and learning issues, and difficulty with decision making and emotional regulation. In addition, short-term effects may include anxiety, depression, acting out in violence and anger (which can lead to juvenile delinquency), separation anxiety disorder, sleep disturbance, low self-esteem, poor academic functioning, social withdrawal and isolation, guilt, fear, and shame. Over time, physical abuse can cause increased rates of suicidality, depression, substance abuse, difficulty in forming healthy attachments, PTSD, and juvenile and adult criminal activity (Wilderman et al., 2014). Moreover, individuals who were abused as children are more likely to become abusive adults (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020). Such trauma can also manifest via increased health risks in adulthood, including an increased risk of diabetes, heart diseases, and other chronic illnesses (Sonu et al., 2019). The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, initially published in 1998, was one of the largest and most widely recognized studies that confirmed the short- and long-term negative impacts of all forms of child abuse on physical and mental health (Felitti, 1998).

Mandated Reporting and its Outcome

Both members of the general public and mandated reporters can report suspected abuse and neglect. Mandated reporters, generally defined as any adult who regularly works with children, are expected to file a report when there is a reasonable cause to believe that a child is at risk of maltreatment (Fontes, 2005). Reportable incidents include child fatalities, physical abuse (e.g., burns, lacerations, welts, fractures, swelling, dislocation, excessive corporal punishment, and internal injuries), neglect (e.g., inadequate guardianship, lack of supervision, malnutrition, failure to thrive, abandonment, inadequate food/clothing/shelter), educational neglect, medical neglect, sexual abuse, parental substance abuse, and child substance abuse (New York State, 2020).

Mandated reporters are only required to report incidents of *suspected* abuse, whereas the CPS investigators are responsible for investigating and determining whether abuse has occurred. These cases are then presented in family court, where CPS can present recommendations, which can include an unfounded indication, where the case is closed, with the offer of voluntary preventive programs. In cases where maltreatment has been determined, a family can be offered programs while under CPS supervision. If this is ineffective or if there is severe abuse, children can be placed in foster care. Attempts are made to provide the least disruptive move for the child, and hence a search will be conducted to determine if a family or community member, or a neighbor, can care for the child (kinship placement). If no other supports are available, CPS will place the child in foster care. In certain states, such as New York, the parents have 18 months to complete the necessary programs (e.g., parenting, anger management, and substance abuse classes, individual therapy [for both the parent and the child], and family therapy), before developing a family reunification plan. During this period, parents have the right to initial weekly supervised visitation. As they show improvement, they can have unsupervised visitation per the judge's order until the court rules that it is safe for the child to return home.

Most CPS reports are filed against parents living in poverty; however, "Differentiating neglect from poverty is a rather difficult and subjective judgment" (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020, p.28). The difficulty of low-income parents to provide financially for their children while often working multiple jobs and long hours, as well as to meet their physical, emotional, and educational needs, has become more challenging. In response, CPS agencies in many states have added preventive programs to provide high-risk families with services, such as case management, for advocacy and to connect them with welfare, food stamps, medical insurance, childcare allowances, financial allowances to secure furniture, and pay rent arrears. In addition, these programs can help families connect with medical, substance abuse, and mental health treatment, as necessary.

Physical Abuse vs. Corporal Punishment

Legally, the majority of states do not prohibit parents from using physical forms of discipline. However, all states have statutes that address child abuse. As a result, state laws are not very helpful in distinguishing between corporal punishment and child abuse (Coleman et al., 2010; Fontes, 2005). Incidents of corporal punishment can vary by nature and degree. Relying on the parents' reports of their disciplinary approaches further obscures this distinction. Factors taken into consideration when delineating CP from physical abuse include:

- The child's age, size, and developmental stage. Was the physical intervention age-appropriate?

- The incidence of the child's intellectual, developmental, or mental disabilities. This can heighten the level of emotional distress caused by corporal punishment.
- The parents' cognitive, mental, and emotional state. Do they have any developmental disabilities or mental illnesses that impact their parenting abilities? Are they connected to their own treatment? How does non-compliance impact their children's care?
- The manner as well as the pattern and/or frequency of discipline. Did the physical intervention cause bodily harm or mental distress?
- Is the disciplinary technique utilized normative to the parents' ethnicity or cultural background? If it is not normative to the child's upbringing (e.g., immigrant parents whose child is born and bred in the United States), what impact will this have on the child?

This complexity may place a burden on mandated reporters in terms of determining whether a case of corporal punishment should be reported or not. Although CPS workers are responsible for conducting the investigation, such a situation may sometimes place the reporters in an ethical conundrum.

Psychologists continue to debate and discuss CP's effectiveness as a disciplinary approach and its potential harm. In a large-scale meta-analysis published in 2002, Gershoff investigated the associations between parents' use of CP and their children's behaviors and experiences across their lifespan. These included the quality of the child's relationship with the parents; the co-occurrence of physical abuse; the child's immediate compliance, mental well-being, criminal behaviors; and the child's later abuse of their own children and spouse. Although the study highlighted many negative associations, it did highlight one reason for CP's continued use: its strong effect on bringing about the child's immediate compliance. Many factors mediate its short- and long-term impacts, including the punishment's frequency and severity and the overall quality of the parent-child relationship. Gershoff's study triggered an academic debate: Some scholars opposed a blanket ban on all forms of physical punishment, including mild to moderate spanking, and others argued that spanking, based on the available scientific evidence, is not to be customarily linked to abuse (Gershoff & Larzelere, 2002; Gershoff, 2002; Baumrind et al., 2002).

Others attempted to offer a somewhat balanced view. Graziano (1994) suggested viewing violent disciplinary practices along a continuum. Light physical disciplinary practices that no one considers abusive fall on one end, whereas extreme practices that almost everyone considers abusive and that may result in serious harm up to death fall on the other end. The difficulty here lies in deciphering those practices lying between these two extremes, for people may vary in their perception and acceptance of them. Interestingly, most physical abuse cases begin as CPs used for disciplinary purposes that cross the line. One

reason for this is that milder CPs gradually lose their effectiveness, which results in lesser forms of non-physical punishments becoming less effective as well. Thus, as the use of CP increases, so does the possibility of physical abuse (Fontes, 2005; Graziano, 1994). As Zolotor et al. (2011) put it: “The most serious unintended consequence [of CP] is physical child abuse. Parents who rely on CP are more at risk for physical child abuse” (as cited in Holden & Ashraf, 2016, p.60).

Child Abuse and Faith

The role of religious beliefs in determining maltreatment and neglect varies by state. Thirty-four states allow adults to refuse medical treatment for themselves and their children for religious reasons, and six states offer a religious exemption to manslaughter charges in cases of child abuse (Sandstorm, 2016). The goal of such laws is to respect the parents’ religious freedom. On the other hand, the 1944 case of *Prince v. Massachusetts* established that parents are obliged to provide appropriate care for their children. In this case, when the aunt and custodian of nine-year-old Betty Simmons, who was expected to work by selling the faith-based magazine “Watch Tower,” was approached by the authorities, the guardian stated: “[N]either you nor anybody else can stop me ... This child is exercising her God-given right and her constitutional right to preach the gospel, and no creature has a right to interfere with God’s commands.” The Supreme Court ruled: “Parents may be free to become martyrs themselves. But it does not follow they are free, in identical circumstances, to make martyrs of their children before they have reached the age of full and legal discretion when they can make that choice for themselves” (Supreme Court of the United States, 1944).

Parents who cite religious justifications to physically discipline their children may do so at their discretion, for example, stating that it is their responsibility to use any means to keep their children on God’s path or that the only way to cure their devil-possessed children is to “beat the devil out of them.” Such religion-based abuse can often be more harmful than non-religiously motivated child abuse, and its impact could include increased depression, suicidality, phobias, social withdrawal, aggression, and dissociative disorders (Bottoms et al., 2015). Although religion, more often than not, can provide children and families with multiple developmental and psycho-social benefits, it has also been used to justify any harm inflicted on children. Overall, the relationship between faith and child maltreatment is one that requires careful examination (Heimlich, 2011).

Islamic Perspectives on Parenting and Discipline

The Islamic Worldview on Parenting

From an Islamic perspective, the ultimate goal of parenting is to develop conscientious, moral, and spiritual individuals who abide by Islam's normative religious teachings, propagate goodness, and promote growth and prosperity on Earth. Islamic scriptures offer parents the relevant guidance and insights to accomplish this arduous task. As parents embark on this daunting journey, they discover that this guidance begins with encouraging potential spouses to base their choices on religiosity and morality and address all stages of parenting, from the etiquette of intimacy to caring for newborns and infants, to teaching young children morals and etiquette and practicing rituals and acts of worship before reaching the age of puberty. In short, a parent or an educator can find numerous tools within Islamic texts for rearing upright children.

Islamic teachings emphasize the parents' great responsibility toward their children and their upbringing. The scriptures use terms such as *protect*, *shepherd*, *teach*, and *command*. Parents are commanded to protect themselves and their household from committing actions that will be punished in the Hereafter (Quran 66:6). They are perceived as shepherds, entrusted with guiding and directing those for whom they are responsible, as is evident in the prophetic saying: "Every one of you is a guardian and every one of you is responsible (for his herd) ... a man is a guardian of his family and responsible (for them); a wife is a guardian of her husband's house and she is responsible (for it) ... Beware! All of you are guardians and are responsible (for your herds)" (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book 67, Hadith 122). This responsibility includes ensuring that their children are both spiritually and morally upright and cared for as regards their physical, mental, and psychological needs.

Numerous prophetic traditions entrust parents with their children's early spiritual education and religious development, which requires teaching and commanding them to do good, avoid evil, and practice good manners. Parents are also seen as spiritual mentors who are responsible for teaching their children the importance of fulfilling religious obligations and guiding them back to the straight path if they go astray. Ample textual support indicates this duty, and classical scholars like Al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) also emphasize that parents are responsible for training their children to have good character and conduct so that they will prosper in this life and the Hereafter (Al-Ghazali, 2004). While these parental duties may seem daunting and like an immense responsibility, Islamic teachings also highlight that this responsibility is carried out within a framework of mercy. Islamic teachings demonstrate that the overarching principles in this regard is gentleness and compassion. Fundamentally, children should be treated with mercy and gentleness, as various prophetic traditions encourage kindness and warn

against violence and harshness. Adopting this principle enables parents to weigh the benefits and harms of their discipline and to keep the child's best interest in mind. The Prophet said, "You should be kind and lenient and beware of harshness and coarseness" when teaching how to respond to harsh adults; hence, these directives would apply even more to children (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book 78, Hadith 60).

The Prophet treated children with mercy, gentleness, care, and playfulness, as can be seen in the many prophetic narrations that offer disciplinary and educational techniques enveloped in gentleness. He embodied mercy and wisdom when pointing out mistakes and teaching children and adults how to behave. For example, a narration from 'Umar bin Abī Salama who said: "I was a boy under the care of Allah's Messenger, and my hand used to go around the dish while I was eating. So Allah's Messenger said to me, 'O boy! Mention the Name of Allah and eat with your right hand, and eat of the dish what is nearer to you.' Since then, I have applied those instructions when eating" (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book 70, Hadith 4). Instead of reprimanding him, the Prophet offered directives about the etiquette of eating, and his gentle approach enabled the boy to observe them for the rest of his life.

In another instance, the Prophet sought to educate a child about respecting elders by using courteousness and benevolence – he sought a boy's permission when he did not need to ('Ulwan, 1992). Sahl bin Sa'd reported that: "A drink was brought to the Messenger of Allah and he drank some of it. On his right was a boy, and on his left were older people. He asked the boy, 'Would you permit me to give the rest of this drink to those on my left?' The boy said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I would certainly not give preference to anyone in anything that might come to me from you.' So, he handed over the rest of the drink to him." (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book 42, Hadith 14).

While the prophetic example reveals the effectiveness of gentleness and compassion when educating and disciplining children, it also shows that different techniques work for different individuals. Parents must be aware of their children's nature and discover which forms of discipline do and do not work so they can keep their child's best interest in mind. As each child differs in temperament, intelligence, and maturity, parents must be aware of the child's disposition when determining the most suitable punishment. A stern glance or tone may be enough for some, whereas others may need to be reprimanded and yet others may only learn through spanking ('Ulwan, 1992).

Islamic texts present a wide range of disciplinary approaches other than spanking, among them preaching, reminding, frowning, abstinence, reprimanding, warning, withholding privileges, and showing a spanking tool. Such variety addresses the needs of human beings, no two of whom are exactly the same. At the heart of this is the Islamic worldview's contention that human beings are

driven by two major instincts: hope and fear. Islamic texts show a balanced approach in utilizing both drives to encourage proper conduct (Qutb, 2004; Shuwaidah & Hirbid, 2005).

Although the Prophet never struck anyone, he instructed parents to “command your children to perform *ṣalāt* (prayer) when they are seven years old, and spank them for (not offering) it when they are ten, and let boys and girls sleep in separate beds” (*Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Book 2, Hadith 105). This tradition highlights the significance of teaching children to fulfill their religious obligations and indicates that some may need different disciplinary measures to become upright. However, this permissibility to spank is accompanied by several restrictions and should be used only if all else fails, as will be discussed in detail later.

Parenting is a responsibility, and parents must fulfill their children’s rights by providing them with everything that ensures their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Another fundamental principle that relates to parenting is not harming children. As the legal maxim “there should be no harm done nor reciprocating harm” is an essential Islamic concept, any form of abuse or neglect is unacceptable because parents and educators are forbidden to harm children. The Prophet even prohibited supplicating against children or cursing them (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 55, Hadith 94). Accordingly, discipline should be carried out only if it will result in a positive outcome, as opposed to satisfying the parents’ anger or frustration. Thus, extreme CP is forbidden, whereas spanking is considered permissible if it meets specific requirements. For this reason, parents and educators may be under the impression that beating children is permissible in general and therefore engage in abusive behavior. Given this fact, they must understand the Islamic perspective in this regard.

Corporal Punishment in Islam

Parents and educators may turn to CP to turn their children and students toward good character and manners, especially when children seem to be going astray or falling into error. Parents may do so while being unaware of Islam’s standpoint on the issue. Extreme forms of CP that cause physical and psychological harm are forbidden, as Islam holds human dignity in great esteem and forbids inflicting harm. Children are a trust, and abusing them breaches that trust. Thus, those who betray it will be held accountable.

Given that gentleness is the standard governing rule in all educational settings, physical punishment should not be the usual disciplinary approach (Al-‘Abdari, n.d.). The Prophet, may peace and blessings be upon him, once saw his wife ‘Ā’isha hitting a camel hard because it was somewhat intractable and difficult to control. He commanded her to be gentle and gracious, saying, “gentleness is not found in anything but that it beautifies it, and it is not removed

from anything but that it disgraces it” (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 45, Hadith 100). Interestingly, this was said in the context of disciplining an animal, let alone a human being. The Prophet describes Allah, the most exalted, as “Allah is Gentle, and He loves gentleness in every matter.” Therefore, Ibn Saḥnūn, Ibn Miskawayh, and other famous Muslim scholars who wrote on parenting and education encouraged praise and gentle guidance over spanking or harsh discipline (Ibn Yahy, 2012; Al-Nasir, 1990).

However, as a gentler approach may not always work, classical jurists reached widespread agreement that mild forms of physical punishment are permissible as a means of discipline (*ta’dīb*) (Al-Shirbini, 1994). Nonetheless, they stipulated many prerequisites and conditions concerning the child, the punishment method, and the person inflicting it. They based their views on a few hadith narrations that seem to permit using physical punishment when necessary, such as the prophetic tradition mentioned above that instructs parents to spank their children for not offering the prayer when they are ten years old. Scholars also stipulate that physical punishment should only be used as a last resort, like resorting to an intense medication regimen when an illness is resistant to treatment.

Although Islamic jurisprudence considers physical punishment an acceptable form of discipline, the famous hadith scholar Al-‘Asqalanī (d. 1449 CE) stated that a teacher has to consider what is in the child’s best interest and most suitable for the infraction. Thus, the teacher should not resort to harsh discipline when a milder form is sufficient (as cited in Al-‘Abdari, n.d.). Other scholars, such as Ibn Al-Ḥājj (d. 1336 CE) and Al-‘Izz ibn ‘Abd al-Salām (d. 1262 CE), agreed and argued that beating can be used only in a state of dire necessity (Al-‘Abdari, n.d.; MERFK, 2006). They also supported a graded approach to discipline, indicating that what might work for one child may not work for another. While some children only respond to physical punishment, a frown or verbal scolding may be sufficient for others (Al-‘Abdari, n.d.). Moreover, to further reduce the need for spanking, scholars encouraged parents to consider warning their children about a possible spanking instead of actually spanking them (Ibn Yahy, 2012).

Scholars outlined certain conditions that must be met before resorting to spanking. Firstly, the parent or educator should use it only as a last resort; that it should not be employed during a state of anger to prevent any harm; and the head, face, chest, stomach, and other sensitive body parts should not be struck (‘Ulwan, 1992). Scholars specified that only a *ghayr mubarriḥ* type of beating is acceptable. This term, which is frequently used in Islamic scholarly texts, refers to the acceptable forms of physical punishment administered at home, a beating that is not disgraceful, violent, excruciating, intense, outrageous, indecent, severe,

tormenting, or agonizing. In other words, only a relatively light, symbolic beating is permissible.

Additionally, some scholars were even more restrictive in this regard. For instance, some allowed using a “whip” but only if it were not as strong as the ones used for corporal punishment in criminal cases (Al-‘Abdari, n.d.). Certain scholars also specified the number of lashes allowed (three) and concluded that the parent or teacher might be liable if they exceed that limit and thereby harm the child. In all of their rulings, however, they urged teachers and parents not to exceed the limits, to avoid physical punishment as much as possible, and to steer clear of harsh tools (invented later on) such as dry sticks and spiky tree branches (Al-‘Abdari, n.d.). Others mentioned that only the parent or educator, as opposed to another child or student, should beat the child. The logic behind this was to prevent jealousy and hatred from developing between them (‘Ulwan, 1992).

After reflecting on such physical punishments’ negative moral and psychological consequences, many scholars forbade or discouraged them and only allowed spanking after all other forms of punishment had failed. The classical scholar Ibn Khaldūn (2015) details how severity harms students, especially young children:

Students ... who are brought up with injustice and (tyrannical) force are overcome by it. It makes them feel oppressed and causes them to lose their energy. It makes them lazy and induces them to lie and be insincere. That is, their outward behavior differs from what they are thinking because they are afraid that they will have to suffer tyrannical treatment (if they tell the truth). Thus, they are taught deceit and trickery. This becomes their custom and character. They lose the quality that goes with social and political organization and makes people human ... and they become dependent on others. Indeed, their souls become too indolent to (attempt to) acquire the virtues and good character qualities. Thus, they fall short of their potentialities and do not reach the limit of their humanity. As a result, they revert to the stage of ‘the lowest of the low’. (p.618)

In this way, he describes that harshness results in the opposite of the original desired outcome, namely, that the children develop a noble character and are righteous (Ibn Khaldun, 2015).

Ibn Khaldūn adopts Muhammad ibn Zayd’s opinion: If children must be spanked, the educator should strike them no more than three times. Likewise, he mentions that Caliph Al-Rashid suggested one of the best teaching methods, as well as many tips to his son’s teacher Khalaf ibn Ahmar:

Let no hour pass in which you do not seize the opportunity to teach him something useful. But do so without vexing him, which would kill his mind. Do not always be too lenient with him, or he will get to like leisure and become used to it. As much as possible, correct him kindly and gently.

If he does not want it that way, you must then use severity and harshness. (Ibn Khaldun, 2015, p.620)

This disciplinary approach corresponds with the prophetic example of showing mercy and gentleness toward children.

When Muslim scholars discussed disciplinary beating and spanking, they justified the use of physical punishment after requiring an assessment of what is in the child's best interest in terms of what best suits his/her character, would be an effective intervention, and would achieve the most benefit and do the least harm. Al-'Asqalanī indicated that spanking's permissibility is linked to its potential effectiveness. Deeming it ineffective or harmful, therefore, cancels its permissibility (cited in Al-'Abdari, n.d.). Such discussions portray beating as a process and decision reached when one is calm and reasonable, as opposed to being a reaction to rage and infuriation. The Hadith literature warns against anger and praises self-restraint during times of rage (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book 78, Hadith 143; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 45, Hadith 140; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 30, Hadith 21; *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*, Book 12, Hadith 8). Therefore, these scholars emphasized that enraged or angry parents or teachers should discipline a child only after they cool down; otherwise, they risk over-disciplining the child. Scholars highlighted that disciplining a child at such emotional times actually is done to meet the parents' or teachers' needs, rather than attaining the child's best interest, and can be more retaliatory and revengeful than disciplinary in nature (Al-'Abdari, n.d.; Al-Qabisi & Khalid, 1986).

Clearly, other means of discipline should take precedence over punishment to ensure that a child becomes a righteous individual. Parents and educators must also keep in mind that because children differ in their natures, the same type of discipline may not work for all of them, just as the same medication does not work for all patients. Their job is to determine why the child made that particular mistake by taking into account his/her age, culture, environment, and other relevant factors and correct the child by applying the most appropriate tool ('Ulwan, 1992).

Overall, Muslim scholars encouraged a balanced approach, one that utilizes positive reinforcement to attain the desired behavior instead of focusing too much on punishing the undesired behavior. It was reported that the famous ascetic Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (d. 782 CE) was encouraged to learn and seek the knowledge of hadith when his father told him, "Oh my son! Seek the knowledge of hadith! For each hadith you learn and memorize, I will give you a dirham" (Al-Baghdadi, n.d., p.66). Scholars encouraged offering both physical (e.g., monetary prizes) as well as non-physical (e.g., praise and showing love) rewards (Al-Qabisi & Khalid, 1986). Additionally, Ibn Al-Ḥājī stated that training and disciplining children properly prevents parents from resorting to physical punishment (Al-'Abdari, n.d.).

‘Abd al-Karim Bakkar, a contemporary Muslim parenting expert, agreed with this view and called for eradicating the culture of spanking and beating as a disciplinary approach. He actually proposed that the need for them could be used as a way of measuring the success of the parents and educators’ parenting skills. If they are needed, the parenting method should be revisited and the people using it retrained (Bakkar, 2009).

As shown above, corporal punishment is only permitted as a last resort and must not physically or psychologically harm the child. If its sole purpose, namely, to train the child to be upright and have good manners, can be achieved through alternative methods, then the latter methods are preferable. If beating does not rectify the child’s behavior, then it is no longer permissible.

Ethical and Moral Dilemmas Surrounding Mandated Reporting

Mandated reporters face ethical dilemmas that affect whether or not they report cases of child abuse. Legal and religious factors may underpin these dilemmas, as may feelings of guilt, religious and cultural differences, a lack of sufficient training, and the inability to distinguish discipline from abuse (Fields & Nunnelley, 1999; Bryant & Milsom, 2005). Mandated reporters, understanding that their reports have consequences, worry if they will break up the family, if the parents will see the child again, if they will have to go to court, or if they will lose their job (Fields & Nunnelley, 1999). They not only grapple with the fear of fines, lawsuits, imprisonment, or losing their jobs if they do not report, but also with the guilt of what may happen to the child and the family if they do. Additionally, there is a possibility that reporting will cause more psychological trauma, for the ensuing process is frequently more traumatic than the abuse itself (Remley & Fry, 1993, p.253). All these feelings and thoughts cause significant anxiety and stress, as mandated reporters struggle ethically with balancing between doing the right thing and fulfilling their legal duty to report.

Muslim mandated reporters have to contend with the added dimension of the Islamic perspective in their dilemmas of whether or not to report. Harming a child is not Islamically acceptable. Additionally, as Muslims are commanded to enjoin good and forbid evil, mandated reporters must try to ensure that the abuse ends by advising the parents that beating is unacceptable or by reporting the abuse to the authorities. In the latter instance, however, the consequences of doing so should be weighed in light of Islamic teachings. Placing the child in a non-Muslim home could harm his/her faith. Thus, the dilemma can be analyzed based on the *maqāṣid al-Sharī‘a* (higher objectives of the sharia), namely, preserving a person’s faith, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth, all of which are essentially interconnected and depend upon each other. The majority of jurists prioritize the preservation of faith, for life’s ultimate purpose is to worship God and the last three are connected to preserving life (Al-Yubi, 1997; Atiyya, 2003).

In cases of abuse, a child's life, intellect, and lineage can be at stake. The sharia mandates that human beings be protected from physical and emotional harm, be provided with what is necessary for survival, that their limbs be protected from losing their function, and that harm be prevented before it befalls a person (Ibn Zughayba, 1996, p.177-79). As such, physical abuse clearly contradicts the sharia's objective of safeguarding life.

Physical abuse also causes psychological trauma, which contradicts the sharia's mandate to preserve the intellect by prohibiting all that distorts it, whether by material means (e.g., intoxicants) and/or anything else that causes psychological harm.

Reporting cases of abuse could break up the family and result in the loss of lineage. As preserving one's lineage is one of the sharia's main objectives, parents are duty-bound and responsible for raising upright individuals. Without that parental guidance, children may go astray and lose their faith. If they are permanently removed from their biological parents and adopted by someone else, they may also lose their lineage.

Preserving these interests and weighing the outcomes of reporting and not reporting abuse further adds to a reporter's dilemma, for doing so puts the essentials of faith, life, intellect, and lineage at risk. Additionally, as a Muslim, one must also enjoin good and forbid evil. Clearly, abuse is an evil that must be stopped. However, determining how to forbid evil in these circumstances, whether reporting to the authorities or advising the parents, is confusing and adds to the mandated reporter's stress.

Applications, Synthesis, and Recommendations

Case Vignette #1¹

Amira, a fourteen-year-old Muslim girl of South Asian descent living with her parents and younger siblings, was seen by a Caucasian therapist for depression. Her father had a history of physically, emotionally, and financially abusing his wife and children. Repeated CPS reports were made against him and were consistently closed on the premise that his abuse was permissible within his religious beliefs. When Amira turned seventeen, she was in her room with a respite worker assigned through a case management agency. Her father entered her room and, angered by her listening to music, pulled her by the hair and pushed her. Amira fell, hit her head on the bedpost, and sustained a cut on her forehead that required stitches. Another CPS report was filed. But despite her visible

¹ N.B. Names and identifying information have been changed for the case vignettes.

injury, the investigation concluded that the allegation of abuse was unfounded on religious and cultural grounds due to her father allegedly responding within the laws of his religion. Following this case, Amira became more defiant of her father: She would lie about her academic responsibilities and started dating in secret. Although she was doing well in school and aspired to go to college, she remained fearful that her father would take her to Bangladesh to get married. Thus, she sought out a partner to escape from her father. Due to the religious and cultural disconnect between Amira's family and the therapist, she was enrolled in a case management program and connected with a Muslim caseworker who also engaged in family work. The caseworker attempted to teach both parents parenting skills; however, the father stated repeatedly that he was a teacher of the Quran in his country of origin, thereby shutting down any communication around healthy parenting techniques.

Case Vignette #2

Fatima is a licensed school counselor who discovers that Sayed, an eight-year-old Muslim child, is being physically beaten at home. Fatima is Muslim and active in the Muslim community, where she frequently encounters Sayed's parents. Being a refugee from an Arab country, Sayed has been working with Fatima at school. One day she notices that he is not himself. Fatima is able to confirm, with hesitation from Sayed, that he is often beaten at home and that lately the beatings have become more violent and intense. She fears for his safety and physical well-being, but also fears the outcome of reporting. Fatima knows that, culturally, the definitions of discipline and punishment vary. However, she is concerned that reporting would cause the child to be placed in foster care, that his siblings will be removed, placed in different, almost certainly non-Muslim, homes, and raised as non-Muslims. Additionally, how will she face his parents at the mosque when they discover that she was the one who reported them? If she does not report, she might face legal consequences. Fatima finds herself in a very difficult situation with complex legal, ethical, and religious outcomes regardless of what decision she makes (Hazratji, 2021).

Discussion

These two cases underline some of the complexities of reporting and handling child abuse and corporal punishment cases, particularly as they interact with cultural and religious factors. They also highlight some of the ethical dilemmas and challenges faced by clinicians and CPS workers.

Corporal punishment has many roots and implications. Severe CP stands out as a matter of grave concern due to its potential harmful emotional and physical consequences. Nevertheless, it continues to be justified via religious interpretations, cultural factors, and legal allowances. Many parents consider CP a

noble practice that yields upright religious children (such as in Amira's case). Otherwise, parents may perceive themselves as *lousy* and neglecting their parental duties (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1971). In addition to the contributing religious and cultural factors, CP may also stem from chaotic lifestyles that are overburdened by poverty, mental illness, or misinformation. It may also be inflicted by otherwise loving, caring, and supportive parents who may occasionally cross the line (Fontes, 2005).

This complexity calls for a case-by-case assessment of CP to avoid generalizations and stereotyping of individual families who belong to those religious and cultural minority groups, as those belonging to a particular group may vary widely in their acceptance of CP practices (Fontes, 2005). The nature and extent of CP must be delineated before suspecting a case of abuse. Baumrind et al. (2002) suggest that the fact that some parents may use severe and excessive CP should not lead to a ban on the use of mild to moderate effective CP. Instead, they suggest that such parents be counseled to avoid CP altogether. In other words, it should be eliminated in families with a high risk of physical abuse, such as in the cases of Amira and Sayed. This careful case-by-case examination attempts to evaluate families' perspectives and practices based on the degree of *ḍarar* (harm) and *ḍarūra* (necessity). CP should be assessed within the family's context and in light of its response to guidance and support, as well as other risk factors that exist within the family.

That being said, clinicians should be aware of what Fontes (2005) called "false negatives," that is, failing to report child abuse when it exists. This might be due to prioritizing religious and cultural values over the child's psychological and physical needs, as in the case of Amira. Clinicians should realize that although there might be more than one way to raise and discipline children, not every cultural practice is harmless. Moreover, religion might sometimes be used in the guise of culture, as opposed to what it really is: a personal interpretation or replication of a communal interpretation of the religion that holds no evidence or truth. To address this, clinicians may need to consult with the appropriate religious clergy or community leaders to better understand the disciplinary practices allowed by Islamic law. Collaborative sessions may also be considered, as well as consulting with supervisors in the case of ambiguity. The overall aim is for clinicians to balance between overreacting and underreacting to cultural and religious factors (Fontes, 2005).

Attempting to address this intricate touchy area, UNICEF collaborated with leading Sunni and Shi'i authorities to release guidance statements regarding children's rights, including the right for protection against CP. In a book published jointly by UNICEF and Al-Azhar University, a leading Sunni authority, entitled *Children in Islam: Their Care, Upbringing and Protection* (1985), it is stated,

Disciplining the child should take place without the use of violence or abusive language, however, children should be brought up with pride and self-confidence... Given that it is not permissible to incur harm, no parent (or teacher or employer) has the right to smack a child; this would inevitably inflict psychological as well as physical damage. Both psychological and physical damages have been banned by the Islamic *Sharī'a*... All forms of corporal punishment should be avoided as a means of disciplining children. The child's parents, teachers or employers should never resort to it. (Al-Azhar University, 2005, p.55-57)

A similar book, entitled *Disciplining Children With Kindness: A Shiite Shari'a Perspective*, was the product of a collaboration between UNICEF and Iranian religious authorities. These efforts underline the importance of delineating what is truly cultural or religious and what one would seek to justify either by culture or religion. Additionally, while CP might be more common or culturally acceptable in a given Muslim family's country of origin, the family is expected to abide by the laws of the land in which they live when those laws do not contradict Islamic teachings. One can argue that the laws related to protecting children do not contradict Islamic law (Al-Qudah, 2009; Adam, 2004). In other words, families' cultural beliefs regarding CP should neither be eliminated nor overestimated, for their cultural values can be supported while simultaneously challenging harsh disciplinary practices (Fontes, 2005).

Clinicians confronted with CP cases clearly play a multidimensional role. Being the first ones to encounter the parents, they have to approach CP in a way that fosters trust with the family, creates a supportive atmosphere, respects cultural values, opens doors for education, and minimizes harm to children. Conversations with parents about CP can come across as offensive, alienating, and threatening, particularly when addressing minority families who may already view child protective services in a negative light (Fontes, 2005). Such a discussion is made even more complex because the US legal system and the Islamic tradition, to a certain extent, consider using CP or physical forms of discipline legally acceptable, respectively. Thus, clinicians should attempt to balance the right to discipline and the right to religious freedom with the duty to protect and report. This balance seems to be missing in Amira's case and is at the heart of Fatima's dilemma.

One way of achieving this balance is to emphasize psychoeducation. Clinicians should take advantage of the educational opportunities that arise in encounters where CP is noted. Education may revolve around alternative disciplining methods, potential harms, and the potential of slipping into a CP so severe that it constitutes reportable physical child abuse. Clinicians may use a "motivational interviewing" style to instill doubts regarding its effectiveness and create some cognitive dissonance and discrepancy with the parents' parenting

values. All of this should be done while being vigilant and prepared to report and intervene in cases of well-meaning but abusive CP.

The above intricacies are difficult to navigate and place clinicians in ethical conundrums. Clinicians are expected to report CP cases that meet the definition of child abuse in the state in which they practice, even if it is done only once by well-meaning, caring parents. Although the CPS investigation's outcome in a case of a single incident of severe abusive CP may significantly differ from a case of repeated physical abuse, the process of reporting and investigating can be traumatic for parents. Therefore, clinicians should carefully decide whether or not to make the family aware of the report. Either way, they must make families aware of their professional duties and boundaries. They may also offer additional education on the process and procedures of CPS investigations if they were to inform the parents about the report. Clinicians should avoid losing the family's trust as much as possible, make them realize that their duty, both before and after reporting, is the child's well-being, and should demonstrate this by acts of advocacy and support (Fontes, 2005). Even when CPS dismisses a case, the clinician has a moral duty to protect the child and support the parents.

When working with observant Muslim clients, clinicians must address the parents' religious concerns, such as their children being placed in non-Muslim foster homes. Although Islamic law supports removing custody from a parent who inflicts physical and psychological harm on the child, one must also realize that protecting the child's faith is critical (Khurshid, 2012). If Muslim foster homes do exist, the dilemmas of many clinicians like Fatima (case vignette #2) would be significantly minimized. CPS workers should do their best to address the families' religious needs and concerns while protecting their children.

Clinicians and parents must also understand Islam's nuanced position on CP. As highlighted earlier, although one hadith narration endorses CP in the context of teaching prayers, the same narration also significantly restricts its use. First, hadith commentators have defined CP in markedly different terms from any potential abusive practices. Second, the Hadith literature underscores that beating should be preceded by at least three years of teaching, motivation, and training. This displays the utility of other disciplinary measures and maintains CP only as a last resort. Third, the Hadith literature indicates that children below the age of ten should not be physically disciplined. Contrast this with the UNICEF report's finding that the ages most likely to experience CP are 5-9 (UNICEF 2010). More importantly, despite this theoretical allowance of CP, Prophet Muhammad never spanked any of his household's members. In fact, he warned a woman against marrying a man who was known for beating women, which is reminiscent of Amira's father (case vignette #1) (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 18, Hadith 45). Thus, practically speaking, Islam allows CP but restricts it so much that its utility is almost nonexistent.

This makes a strong case for advocating that Muslim children be protected from all forms of CP, even if that means reporting such cases to CPS. “Mandated reporting” is a contemporary construct and thus absent from classical Islamic literature. However, it is a form of proactive advocacy reminiscent of *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa nahy 'an al-munkar* (commanding good and forbidding evil), a central practice in Islam and one for which every Muslim shares some degree of responsibility in implementing. Reporting severe cases of CP is a verbal form of *nahy 'an al-munkar*, which intends to minimize the *munkar* (evil) or harm of severe CP and child abuse.

Understanding the Islamic worldview on parenting and discipline is important because, as the UNICEF report indicated, the use of CP is influenced by the parents' beliefs. Households that considered physical violence unnecessary were less likely to resort to it, and vice versa. However, the majority of caregivers utilize CP despite their belief that it is unnecessary, a reality that only highlights the need for a more comprehensive plan for handling and addressing CP. A comprehensive plan should include national strategies to address violence against children, parenting programs to promote non-violent disciplinary practices, training clinicians working with children and families how to handle violence, and public awareness campaigns. Parenting interventions should not only seek to substitute one form of punishment with another, but also to broadly promote the parent-child relationship, reduce stressors, diminish undesired behaviors, and reinforce positive ones (UNICEF, 2010).

Culturally sensitive parenting programs are critical to raising the Muslim community's awareness of this issue. There are some successful precedents in Muslim-majority countries. For example, the *Better Parenting Programme*, implemented nationwide in Jordan, was attended by more than 130,000 parents and caregivers who reported a lower use of negative disciplinary practices. In Yemen, a national parenting and disciplining techniques manual was developed and distributed by the Ministry of Education (UNICEF, 2010). Independent Muslim authors also attempted to make positive contributions to the literature, such as *Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home* (Alshugairi et al., 2017). More efforts by Muslim governments and community leaders in diaspora communities are needed to facilitate training programs for parents and parents-to-be. The role of imams is also critical in disseminating this knowledge and raising public awareness via the Friday sermons and weekly classes.

Conclusion

Despite the wide prevalence of harsh disciplinary practices in the Muslim world, there are more convergences than divergences between the Islamic tradition and the contemporary discourse on children's right to protection against violence. Leading Muslim authorities have issued reports, books, and fatwas advocating the

protection of children against violence. Such Islamic teachings must be translated and disseminated as widely as possible through parenting training programs, public media, and sermons.

Clinicians working with Muslim families may face challenges in interpreting, addressing, and reporting violent disciplinary practices due to cultural, ethnic, religious, and professional factors. They should attempt to strike a balance between overreacting and underreacting to cultural and religious factors. CPS agencies should address the families' spiritual and religious needs when formulating appropriate interventions in cases of confirmed abuse. Clinicians continue to face ethical dilemmas with regard to reporting child abuse, particularly corporal punishment. Training, supervision, consultation, and collaboration with clergy are all potential resources to navigate these dilemmas.

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