

Would Sharia Law Really Fix Sexual Abuse Scandals?

The Independent published an **astonishing article** this week, entitled: “How the teachings of Islam could help us prevent more sexual abuse scandals”. It is written by Qasim Rashid, an Ahmadiyya Muslim writer and commentator. This comes after revelations about Harvey Weinstein’s appalling behavior have been headline news almost continuously for some days.

Can This Be True?

At first glance, one wonders how Rashid can possibly think this. After all, the teachings of Islam enable lecherous men to have up to four wives at a time (**Q 4:3**), any of which can be divorced at will, not to mention sex slaves as well (**Q 4:24**). Accusations of rape require four male eyewitnesses (**Q 4:15**). This means that in Pakistan, for example, women who have been raped often face **charges of adultery** and are imprisoned or worse. There has not been a single Islamic scholarly formal condemnation of such practices. We have all read of the capturing and abuse of sex slaves by Islamic State and Boko Haram, and also of Islamic rape gangs in this country. If none of this is regarded as scandalous then there is a sense in which Islam would indeed do away with sex scandals.

What Is His Argument?

How exactly does Rashid really think that the teachings of Islam would prevent sexual abuse scandals?

Let’s look at his arguments:

“Yes, Islam implores accountability to the creator, but rather than preach empty dogmatic theories, Islam instead prescribes a proven secular model.”

I agree with the benefits of recognizing accountability to the creator. What I don't see is any proven Islamic model for preventing sexual abuse, let alone a "secular" one. Islam does not create secular states, it creates Islamic states. In which Islamic country in any period of history has the teaching of Islam provided a proven model for preventing sex scandals?

Men and Women Equal?

Rashid argues that Islam teaches the equality of men and women:

"In a recent internationally broadcast lecture given live before roughly 6,000 Muslim women, the Khalifa of Islam said, "Chapter four, verse two of the Holy Quran ... clarifies that women were not created out of the body of a man or from his rib. Rather, the Quran testifies to the fact that men and women were created from a single soul and are of the same kind and species."

"Thus, the Quran 4:2 first establishes men and women as equal beings."

Rashid's references are one verse off from standard qur'anic references. So Quran 4:1 does say that men and women were created from a single soul. There is an implied criticism here of the biblical teaching of Eve being made from Adam's rib. This is also the same substance. What really matters is not how they were made, but whether men and women are understood to be equal.

The Bible is very explicit:

"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27).

Both men and women are equally significant, both created in God's image.

Also:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, and there is neither male nor female—for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

An explicit declaration of equality between men and women.

This contrasts with the Qur'an, which in the very same chapter that Rashid is citing says:

“Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great” (**Qur'an 4:34**).

One could also note **Qur'an 2:228**, which states that “men are a degree above [women]”, or **Quran 2:282** which makes clear that a woman's testimony counts as half that of a man.

No Forcing of Women?

Rashid continues:

“Chapter 4:20 then forbids men from forcing a woman to act against her will, thereby ensuring women maintain autonomy and self-determination. This verse also commands men to consort with women in kindness, forbidding men from so much as thinking ill of their wives. This preempts emotional and mental abuse.”

Let's see what **Quran 4:19** (remembering he is a verse out) says:

“O ye who believe! It is not lawful for you forcibly to inherit the women (of your deceased kinsmen), nor (that) ye should put constraint upon them that ye may take away a part of that which ye have given them, unless they be guilty of

flagrant lewdness. But consort with them in kindness, for if ye hate them it may happen that ye hate a thing wherein Allah hath placed much good.”

This is talking about not forcibly inheriting women, which doesn't exactly sound like autonomy and self-determination for women. Neither does this verse state that women should not be forced to act against their will in general terms. The same chapter (**Q 4:3, 24**) talks having sexual relations with women “whom your right hands possess” –that is, slave girls who have neither autonomy nor self-determination.

That verse does talk about consorting with women in kindness as Rashid says. We should read on for more context. In case you are concerned about the verse numbering, here is **Qur'an 4:20**:

“And if ye wish to exchange one wife for another and ye have given unto one of them a sum of money (however great), take nothing from it. Would ye take it by the way of calumny and open wrong?”

This is about exchanging wives, enough said.

No Physical Abuse?

Rashid again:

“Chapter 4:35 furthermore prevents violence against women by forcing men to control themselves and never resort to physically harming women – preempting physical abuse.”

That's not what I read in **Qur'an 4:34** (quoted above) “As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them.” Physical abuse is expressly prescribed.

What About the Hijab?

Rashid goes on:

“The Quran further obliges men to provide for a woman’s every financial need, while holding that anything a woman earns is hers alone—preempting financial abuse. And when it comes to the Islamic concept of Hijab, it is men who are first commanded to never gawk at women, and instead guard their private parts and chastity, regardless of how women choose to dress—pre-empting sexual abuse.”

Rashid is right about financial provision and women’s earnings. With regard to the Hijab, here is what the Qur’an says:

“O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful” (**Qur’an 33:59**).

The implication here is that if women do not cover themselves up then they would be open to abuse, and that such abuse of an uncovered woman would be justified. This suggests then that, contrary to Rashid, women who do not cover up are understood to be inviting abuse.

Men are indeed commanded to lower their gaze from women, and to guard their private parts (**Quran 24:30**); however, this can hardly be said to have prevented, let alone pre-empted sexual abuse in Islamic societies.

Muhammad’s Example

Rashid continues:

“Prophet Muhammad himself illustrated this point. In a famous incident, a woman described as strikingly beautiful approached the Prophet to seek his guidance on some religious matters. The Prophet’s companion, Al Fadl, began to stare at her because of her beauty. Noting this, the Prophet Muhammad did not scold the woman for her attire, but instead, he “reached

his hand backwards, catching Al Fadl's chin, and turned his face to the other side so that he would not gaze at her.

"Accordingly, the Prophet Muhammad by example demonstrated that the burden of modesty, respect and combating abuse of women rests on men. Indeed, men must take the lead in stopping such sexual abuse. After all, while the Quran obliges women to dress modestly as a covenant with God, Islam prescribes no punishment whatsoever for women who choose to dress otherwise.

"On the contrary, on numerous occasions Prophet Muhammad punished an accused rapist on the testimony of the rape survivor alone. In this environment of gender equity, women in Islam rise to the rank of legal scholars, warriors, entrepreneurs and philanthropists while lovingly embracing identities as mothers and housewives."

The incident that Rashid refers to, where Muhammad averts another man's gaze is taken from the Hadith (**Sahih Al Bukhari Volume 8, Book 74, Number 247**). The Hadith are collections of traditions about Muhammad's life, regarded as authoritative by most Muslims. The only example I can find of Muhammad punishing an accused rapist, allegedly on the testimony of the rape survivor alone, is also from the Hadith (**Sunan Abi Dawud Book 39, Hadith 4366**). However, in that case the man confessed to the crime which means that it wasn't merely on the woman's testimony. In another incident where a couple were accused of adultery, Muhammad commanded that man be flogged and temporarily exiled and the woman be stoned to death (**Sahih Al Bukhari Volume 3, Book 49, Hadith 860**). In another case, a woman came to Muhammad and admitted adultery, and Muhammad had her stoned to death after she had weaned the child (**Sahih Muslim Book 17, Hadith 4206**).

Sadly, there are many more objectionable examples of Muhammad in the Hadith. Here are some more that require no further comment:

“Some of the Companions of Apostle of Allah were reluctant to have relations with the female captives because of their pagan husbands. So, Allah the exalted sent down the Qur’anic verse “And all married women (are forbidden) unto you save those (captives) whom your right hand possess” (**Sunan Abi Dawd Book 11, Hadith 2150**).

“O Allah’s Messenger! We get female captives as our share of booty, and we are interested in their prices, what is your opinion about coitus interruptus?” The Prophet said, “Do you really do that? It is better for you not to do it. No soul that which Allah has destined to exist, but will surely come into existence (**Sahih Al Bukhari Volume 3, Book 34, Hadith 432**).

“He (Umar) said: I would say something which would make the Prophet laugh, so he said: Messenger of Allah, I wish you had seen (the treatment meted out to) the daughter of Khadija when you asked me some money, and I got up and slapped her on her neck. Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) laughed and said: They are around me as you see, asking for extra money. Abu Bakr (Allah be pleased with him) then got up went to ‘A’isha (Allah be pleased with her) and slapped her on the neck, and ‘Umar stood up before Hafsa and slapped her saying: You ask Allah’s Messenger which he does not possess” (**Sahih Muslim Book 9, Hadith 3506**).

“After me I have not left any trial more severe to men than women” (**Sahih Bukhari Volume 7, Book 62, Hadith 33**).

“I looked at Hell and saw that the majority of its inhabitants were women” (**Sahih Bukhari Volume 4, Book 54, Hadith 464**).

Islam Is Not the Solution

When Jesus was confronted with a woman who had committed adultery, he said: “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). He taught that

to even look at a woman lustfully is to commit adultery in your heart (Matt. 5:28). He upheld marriage as between one man and one woman (Matt. 19:5). The contrast with Muhammad could hardly be sharper.

Sadly, many Muslims look at the sexualization of Western society, and terrible abuses by the likes of Harvey Weinstein, and think this reflects badly on what they understand to be a Christian society. As Christians, we are equally appalled at the way our society trivializes sex. We see this as the fruit of our society abandoning Christian morals and values. Rashid is badly mistaken if he really thinks Islam would solve these problems.

It is actually the Christian teaching that marriage is between one man and one woman for life, and that sexual relations are reserved for marriage, that is the most liberating and moral teaching for society. This is what needs to be recovered and taught to our children.

Islamic teaching is not the solution to sexual abuse in our society, far from it. Wherever Islam has ruled, women have suffered and been abused because of the teaching and example of Muhammad. No one should be misled by Rashid's ridiculous article. {eoa}

This article originally appeared on Christian Concern.