Building The Bridge To Harmony

Domestic Harmony Foundation

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1. Domestic Violence in South Asian Communities

Domestic violence in many immigrant communities continues to go largely unnoticed because of the social stigma of admitting such atrocities to close family and friends is profound. For many years, public leaders prided on the notion that their communities were untouched by the perils of violence against women, while attempting to maintain an image of strong family alliance. Community leaders strongly engaged in upholding impeccable images of the community, thus preventing many from confronting the complex issues that deal directly with the sacredness of family and community values. In most immigrant and minority groups, family is given greater importance than the individual. There is also a strong will against exposing private matters to the outside world. The situations that occur inside the four walls of a home are to be considered personal and to only be revealed to family members.

It is only until the last three decades that domestic violence has turned what was once perceived as intimate and private family matters into the focus of the public eye, simply because it is deemed a crime in the United States and considered a basic human rights violation by the United Nations not only for the victim but for everyone who witnesses such atrocities. However in many immigrants groups, the notion of domestic violence as crime that can result in incarceration and possible deportation has yet to be taken seriously and unfortunately many survivors of domestic violence are shunned by their families and communities. Instead in immigrant communities we continue to focus on the achievements then to confront social problems that plague thousands of families, because it requires us to look deep into ourselves, question our belief systems and cultural influences in our lives and perhaps work towards changing ourselves and the people around us.

Undoubtedly, here we sit together in a beautiful hall filled with over 150 people and we can all say that we know at least one person or possibly family who has been deeply affected by domestic violence. In fact, one out of every four South Asian woman is a victim of domestic violence. This statistic alone makes it important for us to understand the context within which domestic violence exists in our communities. Meaning, we are no longer considered untouched by domestic violence, but unfortunately affected at the same rate as any other cultural, racial, or ethnic group. It is no longer ‘us vs. them’. We need to be clear at the heart of domestic violence is the abuse of power and control. Today is about providing endless opportunities - we are here to not only understand what we can do as a community to condemn such acts of violence but a sense of awareness about the courage behind many of the survivors surrounding us here today with the help of the incredibly dedicated volunteer staff at Domestic Harmony Foundation.

When people think of victims of domestic violence in our communities, we often hear people describe images of women and families from low-socioeconomic back-
grounds, with very little education, and who are described as physically weak and timid. What many people do not realize is that often times it is the opposite of what we as advocates see out in the work we do every day. Unfortunately these are women seeking guidance are trying to make sense of what her life has come. She has been pushed to her limits and has made attempts to reach out to her close family, friends, community leaders for understanding and support. Women are often told to sacrifice their individual identities to show loyalty to their families, culture, and religious beliefs and so she stays in her failing marriage to uphold the expectations of a ‘good wife’. More often the case, she is abandoned by her community, family, and friends. Choosing to leave an abusive relationship often means leaving behind one’s prestige and status in the community. We must look beyond social stigmas and our presumed assumptions of domestic violence survivors - they are actual people and actual faces. These are women who have suffered through the abuse and violence. They are no longer an invisible group.

DHF cannot continue its work alone and we encourage you all to join us in the fight against gender based violence. We must remember that silence is way of colluding with the perpetrator. We ask that you be open to hear someone’s pain, validating another’s fears, and recognize the abuse of power. As more and more people believe that gender based violence is neither acceptable nor inevitable and help other survivors build independent lives free from abuse - the change to end gender based violence grows deeper and stronger. This is not just a women's issue, this is a responsibility for all of us. This violence is an outrage and it must be stopped. Time has run out for complacency or excuses. Let us show the will, the determination and let us mobilize greater resources and increase our level of self-awareness to help support Domestic Harmony Foundation and their dedicated volunteer staff. By working together as allies and partners, I truly believe men and women can together help make this world a reality and create endless opportunities for many families on Long Island.

By Bushra Husain

“The first step toward success is taken when you refuse to be a captive of the environment in which you first find yourself.”

- Mark Caine

Domestic Harmony Foundation provided a training workshop for Nassau County HHS Staff development on Wednesday March 13, 2013. Nazli Chaudhry and Amal Wahib provided the overview of Middle Eastern, South Asian and Muslim cultures and discussed the impact of domestic violence on victims and children in these cultures.

Amal Wahib, Nazli Chaudhry and Kanchan Rajpal were present at the Nassau County Health and Human services building in Uniondale. They were told that about 25 people are expected to attend but about 40-45 social workers and other service providers filled the room.

After introductions, they started the "Filters" workshop. They passed out clear
sheets of plastic and markers. Nazli asked the attendees to draw a symbol or write something in response to the following prompts: religion, gender, culture and race. They were then asked to think about these filters we all use to process information about others regardless of whether we are conscious of our bias or not. The challenge is to be aware of our biases and try to see every situation with an open mind.

Nazli then talked about the South East Asian cultural perspectives that hinder in accessing social services and how the service provider may be able to assist them by being cognizant and empathetic to the clients.

Amal spoke about her personal experience as an educated immigrant but with a language barrier. She spoke Arabic and French but not English when she came to America. She shared the Middle Eastern perspective.

After their presentation, they answered many questioned and several people stayed past the 2 hr allotted time to ask us more questions.

Some of the questions were:
- What can we do to help them feel comfortable?
- You make it sound like these women have so many obstacles to overcome and they are not going to change so what do you expect us to do?"
- Are there ever happy endings? Have any of your clients moved on from a DV situation?
- Are girls allowed to be educated?

3. Domestic Harmony Foundation’s Multi-Cultural, “Walk to End Domestic Violence”

In order to commemorate October’s designation as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) organized a Multi-Cultural Walkathon on Sunday October 28th. Despite the fact that the weather was significantly windy and cold on Sunday morning as the menacing hurricane Sandy was approaching, over two hundred people enthusiastically showed up to participate in the “Walk to End Domestic Violence”. It was absolutely amazing to see so many people brave through the perilous weather to arrive energized to educate our local community about the prevalence of domestic abuse and the devastating effects it can have on families.

The program commenced with the National Anthem, which was sung by by Ahmad Chaudhry, a 9th grade student at Manhasset high school. Program Coordinator Jasja Mirza welcomed and thanked everyone for coming out in such tumultuous weather. Following her was Reshma Saujani, Executive Director of The Fund for Public Advocacy and Deputy Public Advocate of New York City, who said that, “In New York State alone, there are approximately 400,000 incidents reported to police departments each year. But this is only the tip of the iceberg, because so many cases of domestic violence go unreported, particularly immigrant victims.” Saujani’s words highlighted one of the main objectives of the Multi-Cultural Walkathon, which is to elucidate the plight of women of color who are disproportionately marginalized by law enforcement officials in this country while concurrently being bereft of access to conventional resources for survivors of abuse.

Bushra Husain, a volunteer member of DHF came up on podium and reminded everyone that why have they gathered there. She told that domestic violence is an epidemic of global proportions that has devastating physical, emotional, financial and social effects on women, children, families and communities around the world.

This walkathon was co-sponsored by Habib American bank. Mr. Rizwan Quershi,
Most of you may have endured the pains of raising teen agers and have realized how difficult it could be. DHF members realize that in order to build stronger communities we need to work with youth and establish a safe space where young adults from the ages of 13 to 25 would freely express themselves to their peers. Just as importantly, the group would also create a forum for them to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to serve as leaders in their respective communities.

We had hope that this group would fill a void of youth development services in our community, especially within the South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Muslim populations. Yet, in order to adhere to DHF’s overall mission of addressing the issue of domestic abuse on Long Island, recruitment would focus on co-survivors of domestic abuse.

Many of the youth group participants, including some of the co-survivors of
domestic abuse, were able to open up and talk to each other about some of the issues they were dealing with in life – stress from school, peer pressure, racism, and feelings of loneliness. We deliberately formulated an inclusion program rather than a support group for young adult co-survivors of domestic abuse in order to prevent them from feeling as if they were being singled out. This program was not meant to be a replacement for group therapy as many of the co-survivors were already being given access to counseling services. Rather, since many of these co-survivors had recently moved into the area due to an abusive family member, ensuring that they had supportive relationships was essential.

In addition to the trauma they underwent, many of the co-survivors that DHF works with have also been displaced from their homes, towns, or even countries. DHF recognizes that it is a crucial part of the healing process to provide these youth with the opportunity to speak with their peers about the myriad of stresses they are currently facing and eventually form new, supportive friendships. Research has shown that youth groups positively impact children’s attitudes and behavior, social competence, positive identity, and ways of coping.

Youth participants engaged in interactive workshops given by outside guest speakers in which they were taught how to become more effective leaders in interfaith works and given lessons on how to become more competitive in college admissions and the job market through resume building exercises. My peers and I frequently discussed current affairs issues and participated in formal debates with the goal of increasing our public speaking skills. We watched films and documentaries such as “New Muslim Cool” which discusses discrimination against American Muslims in the post 9/11 era and “Sleeping with the Enemy” which depicts the traumatizing effects of domestic violence on a family.

Young adults who participated in the youth group were also routinely given opportunities to become more engaged in the community through enrollment in national youth conferences, volunteer opportunities at local centers and agencies, and internship announcements. Near the end of the summer, I realized why it was preferable to have a young adult moderate the weekly sessions rather than an adult. Having the youth group led by the youth participants themselves enabled us to take control and feel confident in being in a role of leadership. The turnout for the youth group that summer was fantastic, especially considering that this was our first time implementing it at the DHF office.

The youth group has continued to be facilitated by young leaders every summer since 2010. The degree of growth it has experienced is truly remarkable. It is only because of the generosity of supporters like you that this program has been able to flourish and meet the needs of our community. Recently in summer of 2013, Domestic Harmony Foundation has awarded educational scholarship of $500 to two students who participated in our Summer Youth Leadership Program.

“Everyone has a right to peaceful coexistence, the basic personal freedoms, the alleviation of suffering, and the opportunity to lead a productive life…”

– Jimmy Carter
Long Island, NY- On Sunday May 5th, Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) hosted their 5th annual fundraiser at the Milleridge Cottage in Jericho, NY in their continued efforts to provide services for individuals who are or have been victims of domestic violence.

The event started with an invocation given by DHF’s very own Dr. Kushalata Jayakar Ahmed. Bushra Husain welcomed and addressed the audience about the need to provide services for victims of domestic violence. Shagufta Siddiqi introduced Nassau County’s Department of Social Services Commissioner John Imhof, who read a citation to describe the positive social impact of Domestic Harmony Foundation on the community. This was followed by an award presentation to Dr. Margaret Abraham for being an ardent contributor to the cause. Dr. Abraham, a professor of Sociology and special advisor to the Provost of Diversity Initiatives at Hofstra University, humbly accepted the award for outstanding community advocate presented by the Board Chair, Homaira Mamoor.

The keynote speaker, Manar Waheed, Policy Director of South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT), spoke about her experiences while working at a domestic violence hotline at the age of 19. Manar explained that these direct communications she was engaged in compelled her to go beyond the call of duty by facilitating legal services to victims of domestic violence in immigrant communities. Ms. Waheed’s speech was a perfect segue to the survivor’s story and the abuse she received at the hands of her husband. Her heartbreaking story captivated the audience as she recalled how she became a victim in her own home, highlighting the many forms of domestic abuse especially psychological abuse. Her husband, acting under the guise that God permits such actions, forced her to isolate herself from her loved ones and regularly chided her as worthless, perpetuating feelings of low self-esteem. Domestic Harmony Foundation was able to serve as a positive guiding light by empowering her courage and providing resources to strengthen her to resolve and make a better life for herself and her children. She is taking things one step at a time. The resources at DHF still serve her to this day as she fights against the man who caused her such tremendous pain and suffering. The support and understanding audience showed towards the survivor after her speech really uplifted her spirits, freed her from embarrassment and made her feel welcome in the community.

Following a delicious lunch, musical performer Haider Afzal and ensemble, played their rendition of classical and modern Bollywood music that created an ambience of harmony and lightness to complement the constructive accomplishments of the Domestic Harmony Foundation.

The success of this fundraiser can be contributed to the tremendous and tireless efforts of the Domestic Harmony Foundation staff and hardworking volunteers. The commitment to the values this organization upholds were on full display as demonstrated by the time and dedication needed in creating such a remarkable event benefiting women and children in need.

DHF appreciates the support of our generous sponsors: Dr. Margaret Abraham, Mr. Pradeep Singh, Mr. Chandra Kumar Sunkara, Islamic Center of Long Island, Habib American Bank, Astoria Federal Savings Bank, Dr. Unni Mooppan( Brookdale Hospital), Dr. Humayun Waheed, Mukhopadhay Foundation, Rachel Hall, Senior V.P., Raymond James & Associate and South Asian Times. We would like to thank you to our supporters wholeheartedly and look forward to continuing our efforts to aid victims of domestic violence.
6. Domestic Harmony Foundation’s Support Project - *Knitting a Quilt*

Domestic Harmony Foundation’s support group presents information, provides comfort, teaches coping skills, helps reduce anxiety, and provides a safe place for women to share common concerns. Women become like a close knit family to each other. They become the support system for each other and help each other to find their inner strength.

We all long for understanding, compassion, and respect. Sometimes it’s easier to find this among others who share similar situations or challenges and that is where a support group comes in.

As many of you know, actively engaged people feel less pain and depression. This year our support group project was knitting a quilt. By knitting this quilt we have provided women of our support group a tool to occupy themselves in a skill that has helped them to manage their anxiety levels. Rhythmic repetitive movements of knitting induce a form of meditation.

Knitting has helped them to put into perspective any traumatic issues that would normally dominate their waking thoughts. It also has helped them to find a balance between problematic events and feelings and more positive, pleasant sensations within the current moment. It takes them in a state of mind where they’re not mulling over the past or fretting about the future.

The best thing about this year’s project is that it was not just the support group’s work, but the Board members and DHF volunteers all have worked on it. One square by itself means nothing, but when all are sewn together it becomes a quilt of squares supporting each other, which is a proof of the fact, that support has a concrete meaning.

7. Indian American Forum Gala

Domestic Harmony Foundation was invited to attend the 2nd Outstanding Women's Achievement Awards Gala held by Indian American Forum Inc., a not for profit organization of Asian Indians in America to promote the cultural, secular heritage and values of India as well as the furtherance of friendship and understanding with people of other cultural backgrounds. This event was held during Women's History Month on March 28, 2013 at Stuart Thomas Manor in Farmingdale NY.

Haseena Mooppan and Kanchan Rajpal, volunteers at DHF set up an information booth at the event during the cocktail hour. Indian Americans from all walks of life including local politicians and community activists were among the attendees.

Our volunteers distributed informative flyers about Domestic Violence and spoke about the prevalence of Domestic Violence in the immigrant South Asian community. They provided information regarding the inception and mission of DHF and how DHF has been helping families affected by this social issue. They answered specific questions put forth by the interested community members. Many demonstrated interest in volunteering and donating funds.

Sahara TV and TV Asia gave Haseena and Kanchan the opportunity to speak about DHF on camera and therefore reach a wider audience. They spoke about the various services DHF makes available to the victims of Domestic Violence, including support groups, ESL classes, access to legal aid, counseling and information regarding services available through local government agencies.

After the cocktail hour, the presentation of the awards was followed by a dance and music program and a lavish dinner. During dinner, Haseena and Kanchan continued
On Saturday, July 27, 2013, Dr. Sultan Hameed gave a lecture to women who have encountered some sort of domestic violence. Dr. Hameed, who is a professor of atmospheric sciences as well as the director of the Institute for Terrestrial and Planetary Atmospheres at New York’s Stony Brook University, also teaches at the Muslim Reform

Malala Yousafzai is a fifteen year old Muslim girl who is smart and strong. She stands up for what she believes in. Malala believes in her community, and most importantly she believes in herself. She was not afraid of the Taliban. She is known for her education and women’s rights activism in the Swat Valley.

The Taliban had banned girls from attending school. They were against girls getting an education, watching television, listening to music, and letting women go shopping. "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?" –Yousafzai. Taliban continued to destroy schools. However Yousafzai did not stop thinking about her education. Yousafzai had a blog. She kept updating her blog about the life being controlled by the Taliban. One of her blogs stated "Our annual exams are due after the vacations but this will only be possible if the Taliban allow girls to go to school. We were told to prepare certain chapters for the exam but I do not feel like studying.” The Taliban knew of Malala blogs posting so they came looking for her.

On 9 October 2012, a Taliban gunman shot Yousafzai as she rode home on a bus after taking an exam in Pakistan’s Swat Valley. She was hit with one bullet, which went through her head, neck, and ended in her shoulder. A chief spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban said that Yousafzai “is the symbol of the infidels and obscenity,” adding that if she survived, they would target her again. The Taliban said that they warned Yousafzai father to stop his daughter from using dirty language against them. Since her father did not listen the Taliban was forced to take this extreme step. Also Yousafzai and her father (Ziauddin) remain on the Taliban’s list of intended victims.

This shows that how much of Islam these people know. In fact they are so ignorant of the teachings of Quran, that they don’t even know what true Islamic teachings are? The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has said:

"It is the duty of every Muslim man and woman to seek knowledge."

The problem with the Taliban, however, is that most of their leaders are illiterate. They literally don't know how to read and write. Their followers, who are mostly uneducated, blindly and ridiculously follow their leaders and twist Allah Almighty’s Commands.

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“According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, which includes crimes that were not reported to the police, 232,960 women in the U.S. were raped or sexually assaulted in 2006. That’s more than 600 women every day.”

“‘You show others how to treat you.’
— Anonymous

“The healthy man does not torture others. Generally it is the tortured that turn into torturers.”
— Carl Jung
Movement Organization, where he leads discussions of ayas of the Holy Quran. The aya that was examined on Saturday’s event was from surah 4, aya 34, which goes into the relationship between husband and wife. Dr. Hameed discussed how this aya was misinterpreted by many scholars, leading men to “beat” their wives. He compared examples other of surahs and ayas, and how scholars had explained the full interpretation to give a full understanding about a topic, yet conveniently left out the interpretation of the aya in the same surah, which encourages husbands to treat their wives with kindness and not in a harsh manner. The lecture ended with a question and answer session, in which Dr. Hameed clarified other misinterpretations and aided the women with verbal support and knowledge regarding their particular circumstance.

Dr. Hameed teaches weekly in Brookville, NY. His book “The Quran and the Life of Excellence” was published in 2010, which goes into Quran verses and advice regarding the verse.

10. Meena Bazaar

Women’s History Month is an annual declared month worldwide that highlights the contributions of women to events in history and society at large. Domestic Harmony Foundation participated in the Meena Bazaar on Wednesday March 13th. It was a huge success, a great way for people to come together and raise funds for different charities. Women from all walks of life attended this event. There were vendors of all kinds. Goods such as clothing and jewelry were sold along with delicious foods. The clothes were rich in color, filled with jewels and were just beautiful. The food was delicious as well, it was rich in flavor and everyone enjoyed it. The main goal was to raise funds and help those affected by domestic violence and ensure the safety of women and children.

11. Eid Party 2013

Domestic Harmony Foundation (DHF) held an Eid Celebration Party on August 14, 2013. The party was held in Hicksville, NY. Women and children dressed in their finest holiday attire came to celebrate with food, drinks, henna tattoos and dancing. The night had games and prizes for all, including musical chairs, charades, and Simon Says. For four hours, everyone left their worries at home and socialized and had a good time with friends. At the end of the night, guests gathered their belongings, thanked the board members and staff of DHF and headed home.

12. APIIDV on Domestic Violence - National Summit 2013

From June 30th to July 2nd API has organized a beautiful summit “to put our work on the map”. This summit brought together all of the Asian Pacific islander organizations and advocates on the same platform, to see what we are doing right and what we need to change to gain the momentum in our movement.

To end domestic violence from our communities we need to change hearts, minds and attitudes. This goal cannot be achieved without engaging the communities. Traditions, food, music, dances and clothing distinguish cultures. We should learn to accept and practice the good part of our cultures and leave the bad part that stifles, hurts and frustrates us.

Member of Domestic Harmony Foundation attended this Summit and learned that such conferences are imperative in our collective efforts. There was a combination of
thought provoking plenaries, skill building workshops which focused on engaging communities and changing the patriarchal culture as steps building towards gender democracy. The summit provided the opportunities for networking and peer-learning.

The workshops provided necessary training in the following areas individual assessments, client based assessments, and evidence based practices in culturally relevant programs. Emphasis was laid that survivor stories alone are not enough; we need to collect data and see how our services are gradually helping survivors reach their goals. We should be able to identify the need for culturally relevant services for our clients and compare the mainstream against culturally specific data.

Community engagement is the most important factor for our work. We should strive to work with those who are most impacted and help them grow into leaders. Remember that nothing for us without us is a very powerful notion and it could help them in healing the past and changing the future for them and their children. It is a great way of reclaiming ownership, sculpting goals and dreams for the life they always wanted.

We have the responsibility to represent those who cannot represent themselves. Respect old wisdom and energy and nurture new talent and strength. This movement is about building family, sisterhood and strong healthy communities. This is a movement to sync up so we can power up.


Manavi had organized 5th Aarohan “Rise Up” against Domestic Violence conference from Aug 23 - Aug 25 2013, at Hyatt Regency New Brunswick New Jersey. The purpose of this national conference was to come together and share the new struggles, challenges and achievements in order to serve our communities better.

On Saturday, August 24 2013, Cultural sensitivity workshop was presented by Sujata Warrier and Bidya Ranjit. Sujata is the Director of the New York City Program of the New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. She has an extensive experience of presenting training sessions for professionals in the field of law enforcement, criminal and civil justice, health care and social services on the issue of cultural sensitivity. Bidya on the other hand is Executive Director of Center for Academic Programs and the Director of Student Support Services at the University of Connecticut.

Both of them together presented an enlightening analysis of what culture is? A culture is a way of life of a group of people—the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next. The idea of cultural implications in our work was discussed. How we cannot generalize any situation and how can become inclusive.

Culture has no boundaries and is very permeable, in other words it’s constantly changing. Speakers vigorously gave the participants some questions to have group discussions and pointed out that how our own stereotypes can affect the outcome. One table presented that yes South Asian culture has lots of bad practices but we cannot forget about our good values. At that example Ms. Warrier pointed out the recent elderly suicide attempt and relayed that we cannot generalize any situation and it actually perpetuates stereotypes when we say that we treat our children and elders well. We all
know this is not entirely true so always have an open mind to every situation and do not let our biases affect any situation. Another group shared a story that when their organization served a Muslim client from Bangladesh, the client said "she never thought a Hindu will help her".

Ms. Ranjit talked about self reflection on how did we get here? She stressed that we cannot and should not generalize about cultures and recruit from underrepresented groups in order to reach out to minorities. We need to open up services across the board in order to make our organizations inclusive.

What steps should we take to bring change within organizations, services as well as outreach and prevention efforts?

For organizations, cultural sensitivity involves a commitment to assessing, supporting, and evaluating an agency’s ability to effectively meet the needs of the community in which it works. This may include identifying communities that may need services, but are not seeking them, and gathering data on the effectiveness of the services being provided.

A great thought was given to how can we make our service providers more sensitive to the specific cultural needs of different population without falsely perpetuating generalization of a particular culture or ethnicity? In other words how do we maintain the balance between spreading awareness and resisting partaking in the problematic stereotypes of various cultures?

In the end, workshop moderator Jasie Mirza thanked the Speakers and emphasized on being aware of one’s own biases and tries to see every situation with an open mind. She referred to the simple rule of thumb “treat others the way you want yourself to be treated”.

14. Survivor’s Story

Where should I begin my story? I had a love marriage with a longing for respect, compassion, and care. I saw some warning signs but ignored them out of hope for the future. He told me about his girlfriends, drinking alcohol, and smoking marijuana. He admitted it was all wrong and promised me that he would quit all of this and start a righteous life with me. I accepted him as an honest person who was trying to change. I believed him completely and we got married.

What hurts more is that it did not occur after years of marriage, but started soon after our marriage and increased slowly and gradually. First incident was unexpected and shocking while I was driving his car, and he cursed. Totally shocked, I stopped the car, he begged for apology and I forgave him.

He would not let me work because he wanted me to open the door with a smile when he gets home. But later this feeling changed into condescending statement, like “What kind of job can you get, a receptionist, a secretary? That’s it? Excuse me, I have two Master’s degrees.

I kept making excuses for all of his actions - he's over protective, a little jealous because he loves me, maybe it's too early and he will gain trust as he gets to know me more.

As I said earlier I had accepted him as an honest person who was trying to
change and thought may be God chose me to help him. He discouraged any contact with my friends and family, and eventually I stopped smiling because he said it can convey a wrong message to people. He changed me completely, to the point, that I could not recognize myself anymore. So this pleasant, outgoing and always smiling person was lost. I was not supposed to keep any secrets from my husband so he made me give him all of my passwords including my email account, web-accounts and even online bank accounts.

Slowly I became totally isolated in my own home.

The abuse became worse during my pregnancy. His arguments and alcohol consumption became more frequent. He made me shred all of my photos because he suspected that there may be someone in my past. I did everything for him because I wanted to prove to him that I have no one in my life except him. But no matter what I tried, it was never good enough.

Then, he started using money out of my personal account without my consent and confrontation brought nothing but fights, curses, and insults. I was now worried about my son growing up witnessing these arguments, which were becoming more and more frequent. I tried to talk to him, offered mediation through family, friends, or even Islamic marriage counseling. I did not want this marriage to fail. I did not want to give my child a broken home, but he declined to get any counseling whatsoever.

Meanwhile, I got pregnant again. The abuse continued and THEN I discovered that he was cheating on me. I used to ask him “how can you express such hatred for me, are you involved with someone else? Sure enough, that was the case.

I was having a girl this time and the thought of a divorce scared me. I was going through an emotional roller coaster. I wanted to save my marriage. I would not live like a divorcee otherwise people will raise eyebrows on my daughter too. I was aware that my husband had serious problems but I wanted to do my best to help him. Because, those thoughts of broken home would weigh me down.

Luckily at my OB/GYN clinic the nurse and social worker, recognized the issue and provided me with the contact number of Domestic Harmony Foundation. I approached DHF mainly asking for marriage counseling through a Muslim counselor in my efforts to save my marriage and hoping that he would change.

Coming to Domestic Harmony Foundation for the support group was like a wakeup call for me. I realized that isolating me from my family, friends, support system and depriving me of my finances were all violations of my basic rights! I realized that this is domestic violence I have been going through. I did not have a black eye, bruises, or broken bones, but I had lost my confidence, my self-esteem was shattered into pieces and my soul was wounded.

I was always walking on egg shells, not to say or do anything that could annoy my husband and when he cursed or insulted me I did not have the strength to speak up. I feared him and I lost my will to protest.

Despite limited DHF resources, they made sure that I was connected to other reliable resources and was not left alone. This assurance enabled me to keep my sanity and helped me to prepare for the safety of my children and myself.

Even after acknowledging the domestic violence, I could not make myself leave my husband. At one point he said to me, “I will never divorce you I will keep you in this relationship forever and humiliate you to the worst you could ever imagine”. I looked at
Domestic Harmony Foundation

his mother who happened to be there at the time, and she said, “If you can’t keep your man in love with you, it is basically your fault”.

There were many times he threatened me that he has the right in Islam to physically beat me. He told me “women like you who approach police or courts meet the same fate as the wife of Muzammil Hussain. She took off and was murdered by her husband. If you ever think of calling the cops, remember I will get to you before they get to me”.

I was afraid now that he can really hurt me! Yet, the final blow was when he started cursing my kids and would ask them to curse at me. Now I knew it is my children that I have to SAVE and not this broken, troubled and dysfunctional marriage. I knew that if I let my children live under this constant abuse, the cycle will continue. My husband carried on his father’s tradition of abusing his mother, and although he hated it but he continued doing the same.

Now, he has stopped all financial support, hired an expensive lawyer and has threatened to take the kids away by portraying me as a psycho, abusive and incapable mother. My struggle is not over, but I have complete faith in my Creator, who gave me life and two beautiful children. I am positive that we will live a better life, a life free of abuse and fear, in the near future. IA.

15. 2nd Annual Walk to End Domestic Violence

Upon driving up to Eisenhower Park, Field 5 in Nassau County, Long Island on the Sunday morning of October 27th, 2013, you would have spotted a large group of huddled masses. Purple balloons lined the podium, granola bars and water bottles were being handed out in assembly line formation, and hands were grabbing t-shirts in the search for the right size. These people had all come out on a weekend morning and braved the cold to show their support for Domestic Harmony Foundation’s (DHF) Second Annual Walk to End Domestic Violence.

Program coordinator of DHF, Jasia Mirza, commenced the morning’s events with her kickstarting speech. She started off her speech by declaring: “First, women are not the only ones who can be victims of abuse. Men, albeit a relatively small percentage, are also at risk for domestic violence and no one, ultimately, is immune to this.”

After some applause in the rightful recognition of domestic violence as a societal, and not just a women’s problem, Mirza continued: “…domestic violence is a truly complex issue...The cycle of abuse includes the so-called “honeymoon” phase in which a false notion of love is conveyed to victims who cling to the good times often out of fear for financial, legal, or other imminent hurdles. However...the level of violence that the victim is subject to elevates with each cycle of abuse...Often, victims will sense warning signs but hope to reform the abusive partner or avoid engaging in behaviors that they feel might trigger the violence...overcoming domestic violence is clearly no easy feat that can be summed up by telling women to “simply leave.” This is a ludicrous assertion that avoids recognizing that leaving an abusive relationship requires tremendous support from other others, such as family, friends, community partners, and so forth. No one can become a survivor on their own.”

Several prominent community leaders attended the walk to show that they, too, believed in DHF’s vision of eradicating domestic violence from our communities in order to create a safe and healthy environment for all. Former County Executive Mr. Tom Suozzi first stood up at the podium to speak. He reaffirmed DHF’s commitment to domestic violence as a serious societal issue by pointing out that there are numerous barriers that prevent victims from leaving abusive situations. These victims should be
able to utilize resources provided the community. Honorable Judge Hope Zimmerman then spoke and also asserted that while domestic violence victims need to leave their abusive partners, they should not be expected to do it all alone.

Next up was Mr. Hamza Byas, President of the Islamic Center of Long Island, who stressed that domestic violence plagues communities at every racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic level. “Domestic violence knows no boundaries,” he proclaimed. Following Mr. Byas was Mr. Rizwan Qureshi, Senior Executive Vice President at HAB bank of New York, who reinforced the importance of the work DHF is doing. Finally, Margaret Abraham, Professor of Sociology and a Special Advisor to the Provost for Diversity Initiatives at Hofstra University, spoke. Abraham has done significant work in combating domestic violence in our communities through her multiple research endeavors.

The walk could not have been made possible without the generous support of co-sponsors HAB bank of New York and Civic Center of Hofstra University. Mr. Veeran Kutty of GNC Baldwin, Trader Joes’ Merrick, BJ’S and Stop & Shop donated water bottles and energy bars. Participating groups included the following:

AAPNA Alliance  
Adelphi University  
Five Towns Indian Association  
Islamic Center of Long Island  
National Council of Jewish Women of Peninsula Section  
National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra University  
Office of Student Leadership Activities at Hofstra University  
Selden Masjid  
South Asian American Women Alliance  
Student Activities Center at Hofstra University

Over three hundred people attended Domestic Harmony Foundation’s Second Annual Walk to End Domestic Violence. Participants reflected the multicultural and socioeconomic diversity of the clients that DHF works with on a daily basis. This diversity unfortunately reaffirms the reality of domestic violence as an issue that impacts people of all background. DHF strives to provide victims with necessary support through both interventions and preventive strategies, such as by educating our youth about the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationship dynamics. The battle against domestic violence in our society is ongoing and there is an incredible amount left to achieve. DHF depends on the support and generosity of people like the participants of the walk to continue making much-needed progress.

DHF would welcome individual and corporate sponsors for their events as well as speakers. DHF would also welcome volunteers and professionals who can offer their time and services towards this cause. If you are an attorney, social worker, case worker, clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, early intervention specialist, or have other skills or resources that you feel could be put to good use, please email us at: info@dhfny.org

We’re on the Web!  
www.dhfny.org