

# The Concept of Women-Beating in (Q 4:34): A Textual and Contextual Analysis

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## Abstract

This paper is concerned with the textual and contextual analysis of wife-discipline in particular in (Q 4:34) and the concept of women-beating in the Qur'anic discourse in general. The study makes a special reference to two translations of the Qur'an, namely: Abdel Haleem's The Qur'an: A New Translation (2004); and George Sale's The Qur'an (1734). This account investigates a psycholinguistic analysis of the meaning of 'beating' in the entire scripture, in general, and in (Q 4:34), in particular. To achieve this, an in-depth textual and contextual surgery is performed to uncover new psycholinguistic perspectives. The study reports on attitudes of a sample of 163 Saudi women towards violence against women in KSA. Four constructs will be investigated, namely: 1) social aspects of violence against women; 2) socio-economic status/ educational aspects of violence against women; 3) preventive indicators of violence against women and; physical aspects of violence against women. It also highlights the claim of Halliday and Hasan (1976:9) that cohesive ties are the only source of texture. This account runs counter to that claim.

**Keywords:** communicative vs. literal translation, Qur'anic discourse, psycholinguistics, textual and contextual analysis, wife-beating, wife-discipline

## 1. Introduction

Q 4:34 has sparked off an intense debate among western scholars on the issue of violence against women, particularly wife-discipline. To begin, the Qur'an has 57 verses tackles the issue of *q-r-b* (to hit, to strike) which is a context-bound word. Only 9 verses out of 57 deal with the idea of physical beating. In a practical manner, the verses are as follow: Q 47:27, 2:60, 7:160, 26:63, 38:44, 8:12, 4:34, 47:4, and 37:93. Only a couple of verses (i.e. 4:34 and 38:44) stress the idea of wife-beating, while the rest of them are mentioned in different contexts and accordingly have different contextual meanings. This article undertakes a survey of verses that use any permutation of the word *q-r-b* in relation to husband\men striking wives\women, excluding all other verses that connote different textual and\or contextual meanings. *q-r-b* (Note 1) has many different meanings in *tafsir* literature. Some of these meanings are: to slap, to give an example, to walk, to slaughter. The verb *q-r-b* does not have these meanings in isolation, but linked with direct object, preposition, or other verbal indicator. This article highlights the exegesis of Q 4:34 in the light of Q 38:44 which explains and answers many questions raised by contemporary scholars. And experimentally, a questionnaire to 163 Saudi women has been carried out to measure their attitudes towards the violence against women in the light of Q 4:34.

Verse 4:34 reads: "*arrijālu qawwāmūna 'alā 'annisā'i bimā faḍḍala Allāhu ba'ḍahum 'alā ba'ḍin wa bimā 'anfaqu min 'amwālihim falṣṣāliḥātu qāniātun ḥāfiẓātun lilghaybi bimā ḥafiẓa Allahu wa allātī takhāfūna nushūzahunna fa'izūhunna wa 'ahjurūhunna fī almaḍāji 'i wa 'aḍribūhunna fa'īn 'aṭa'nakum falā tabghū 'alayhinna sabīlan 'inna Allaha kāna 'aliyyan kabīran"*

### Abdel Haleem's Translation:

Husbands should take good care of their wives, with (Note 2) [the bounties] God has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their own money. Righteous wives are devout and guard what God would have them guard in their husbands' absence. If you fear high-handedness (Note 3) from your wives, remind them [of the teachings of God], then ignore them when you go to bed, then hit them (Note 4).

If they obey you, you have no right to act against them: God is most high and great. (Abdel Haleem, 2004:54)

### **George Sale's Translation:**

Men shall have the pre-eminence above women, because of those advantages wherein God hath caused the one of them to excel the other, and for that which they expend of their substance in maintaining their wives. The honest women are obedient, careful in the absence of their husbands, for that God preserveth them, by committing them to the care and protection of the men. But those, whose perverseness ye shall be apprehensive of, rebuke; and remove them into separate apartments, and chastise them. But if they shall be obedient unto you, seek not an occasion of quarrel against them; for God is high and great. (Sale, 1734:65)

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Participants*

The sample of this cross-sectional survey consisted of 163 Saudi women, all Muslims, and with different ages, educational background, marital status and occupations. Regarding ages, (9.20%) was under 20 years, (38.65%) ranged from 20 to 25 years, (36.80%) from 26 to 35 years, (10.42%) from 36 to 45 years, and (4.90%) from 46 to 55 years. For the educational background, the majority were University students (49.69%), high school graduates (11.65%), preparatory-school graduates (3.68%), primary-school graduates (3.06%), literates (3.06%), and post-studies graduates (1.22). Concerning the marital status, the majority was married (50.92%), single (44.78%), divorced (3.68%), and widowed (.61%). For occupation, the biggest portion was students (46.01%) who do not work, (16.56%) housewife, (14.72%) teachers, (10.42%) governmental employees, (9.81%) no work, (2.45%) businesswomen. Additionally, the number of participants were originally 169 but 6 out of them were eliminated due to either incomplete answer or incomplete data.

### *2.2 Instrumentation*

A 30-item (Note 5) questionnaire was developed to measure the attitudes of the participants towards violence against women and practically to examine their understanding of Q 4:34. A three indicator scaling was applied to assess the level of agreement with each item (1 = great deal of agreement, 2 = agree to some extent, 3 = disagree at all). The instrument was translated into Arabic to facilitate communication with all participants who have different learning backgrounds. No footnotes or extra information were asked to be added, some participants, due to their positive interactions with some questions, annotated their opinions though. Simply, the level of agreement percentage was generally calculated, dividing the number of agreement obtained for an item on the total number of the participants and then multiplied by 100. For example, if the level of agreement is 36, it is divided by the total number of participants 163 and then multiplied by 100, accordingly,  $36/163 \times 100 = 22.08$ .

### **Challenges of Q 4:34**

Several debates and interpretations of this verse confuse the Target Reader (TR) and render a somewhat ambiguous meaning. Three problematic terms (*qawwāmūn*, *nushūz* and *ḍaraba*) and a subtle syntactic structure have constituted the challenges and countless interpretations of Q 4:34 and different translations accordingly. First, the meaning of those terms is a little bit unclear due to the sensitive and critical time when the husband/wife relationship is threatened by wifely disobedience and accordingly the bad consequences that might occur. Family institution is the main core of society in Islam; therefore the husband/wife relationship is the centre of this core. Bearing in mind that *nushūz* (disobedience or high-handedness) is not restricted to wives, but to husbands as well as in the same chapter Q 4:128. "It applies to a situation where one partner assumes superiority to the other and behaves accordingly." (Note 6) The second subtle word is the intensifying paradigm form *qawwāmūn* (in charge of, take good care of). The meaning of this word, according many traditional Muslim scholars (that will be examined later), states that men are the guardians of their women, or they are the financial providers of women, and the most importantly is that God has given to some more than others. Ambiguous as it is in the Source Text (ST), whether God has made some men excel the women or vice versa; both meanings are acceptable. According to Abu Ḥayyān (d. 754 H), the pronoun in *baḍāhum* (some of them) refers to either men or women, but it is mentioned in the masculine form due to the rule of *taghllīb* (governance) of masculine to feminine (Note 7). Lexically, the verb *daraba* (to beat, to strike) in this context has no challenges to some extent, but technically, the measure of striking and methods or tools used in that matter constitute the pivotal issue of this verse. Some exegetes point out that it means "to spank", "to beat", "to tap lightly", or even "to separate".

Second, the subtlety of the syntactic structure of the three recommended steps for dealing with disobedient women carries two options: whether they are presented as simultaneous possibilities (Note 8) or consecutive steps (Note 9). Part of the difficulty is the first part of the conditional sentence (If you **fear** *nushūz*

'high-handedness' from your wives). Are those women from whom you fear *nushūz* are different from those who have actually committed *nushūz*? How do men feel or measure the approaches of their wives' *nushūz*? And what are the criteria of *nushūz*? All of these debates and questions are demonstrated in detail below.

### **Exegeses of Q 4:34**

In this section, the commentaries and views of some authentic Muslim linguistic exegetes (i.e. Al-Rāzī "d. 606 H", Al-Zamakhsharī "d. 538 H" and Abu Ḥayyān "d. 754 H") are presented to uncover the textual intricacies of this verse. In addition, Ibn Manzūr's *Lisān al-'Arab* is consulted to make sure of the lexical meanings and usages of problematic terms.

Al-Rāzī, Al-Zamakhsharī and Abu Ḥayyān indicate that *qawwām* is an intensifying paradigm meaning "always taking good care of" their wives, like an alderman who is always in charge of his people. The state *qawwāmah* does not mean superiority of the husband above his wife, as many western scholars and translators point out. "This guardianship rests on a dual basis: the divine preference of men over women (*bimā faḍḍala Allāhu ba'dahum 'alā ba'din*), and the socio-economic role assigned to men (*wa bimā 'anfaqu min 'amwālihim*)" (Note 10). It is noteworthy that the divine preference to men over women is due to four qualities: reason (*'aql*), prudence (*ḥazm*), firm will (*'izm*), and strength (*quwwa*) (Note 11), while the socio-economic role is mainly conditioned with the husbands' financial provision for their wives. In this context, Abu Ḥayyān states that one of the women's rights is to ask for divorce if her husband could not spend or meet her financial needs. For *nushūz*, Al-Rāzī points out that it is a wifely disobedience or high-handedness, as disagreement between husband and wife caused by either one of them. This kind of disagreement could be either verbal or nonverbal, i.e. incongruous deeds. Al-Zamakhsharī sees that it is related to refuse sharing beds with husband. Abu Ḥayyān adds that the verb *takhāfūna* that precedes *nushūz* is technically significant, meaning 'if you are sure and certain' not 'if you fear' because the orders that follow are resulted from committing *nushūz* not anticipating it. Moreover, the textual meaning of the conditional sentence that follow *fā'in 'aḥa'nakum falā tabghū 'alayhinna sabīlan* entails that they actually committed *nushūz*, accordingly it is resulted from a real state of *nushūz*, not just fearing to commit it. Abu Ḥayyān, the linguist, thinks that there is a syntactic deletion in this clause, as it could be read *wa allātī takhāfūna nushūzahunna (wa nashazanna)*, meaning 'if you fear disobedience from your wives (then they committed it)'. Accordingly, he classifies the three orders into two steps: step one in case of fearing *nushūz*, you are allowed to remind her of the teachings of God, and step two if she has committed *nushūz*, then ignore her when you go to bed, then hit her. If the wife made her mind and stopped her *nushūz* at any stage of those steps, you would be entirely prohibited to move on the next step. Lexically, the term *'aḍribūhunna* (hit them) is crystal clear. However, the measure of wife-beating or physical disciplining is a little controversial. Al-Rāzī, Al-Zamakhsharī, and Abu Ḥayyān agree that this step of beating disobedient wives is the last resort and should be limited, 'light' and 'not painful' (*ḍarb ghair mubarrīḥ*). The husband should not injure his partner to the point of breaking a bone, nor slap her face, but he might use a *siwāk* 'toothpick' to discipline her. Al-Rāzī reported that Al-Shafī stated that the beating is allowed but better avoiding it. Moreover, the syntactic structure of the linking prepositions (*fā'izūhunna wa 'ahjurūhunna fī almaḍāji ' wa 'aḍribūhunna*) constitute a grammatical pitfall and accordingly an interpretation and a translation intricacy. On the surface syntactic level, they are presented as simultaneous possibilities, and accordingly the three steps are applicable instantly. However, on the deep level and according to many traditional views, the prepositions (*fa*, *wa*, and *wa*) are consecutive steps and should be taken step by step accordingly.

### **The Revelation of Q 4:34 and its historical background**

According to Al-Rāzī, the daughter of Muhammad b. Salama went to the prophet to complain her husband Sa'd b. al-Rabī, one of the heads of the Anṣār, who slapped her and left a mark on her face; she *nashazat* shunned him in the bed accordingly. The prophet, at first, wanted to ordain (*qiṣāṣ*) retaliation against the husband. However, at that time, the verse Q 4:34 was revealed (Note 12). Therefore, the prophet said, "we wanted something, but God wanted something else. What God wanted is better". On the other hand, Al-Zamakhsharī and many classical and modern exegetes accepted that the wife was Ḥabība bt. Zaid b. Abī Zuhair. Other accounts attributed to different names of companions and their wives have tackled the same issue. Meanwhile, the research of revelation is significant; however, the main objective of this article is limited to the linguistic textual and contextual analysis of the meaning of the word *d-r-b*.

### **A new contextual reading of d-r-b in Q 4:34**

Some modern scholars read, interpreter and translate the verse in an uncommon way in order to mitigate the plain picture of beating wives. However, the idea is that the literal lexical meaning of *wa 'aḍribūhunna* is "hit them". Taghian (2013:4) (Note 13) points out that "the lemma (ḍ - r - b) is the same, but these abound with

homonymic expressions that connote different meanings and explanations that are dependent on context". According to Abdel Baqi (2001:418-419) (Note 14), the scripture has 57 verses that tackle the issue of *ḍ-ḥ-b* (to hit, to strike); only 9 verses out of them deal with the idea of physical striking. These verses are as follows: Q 47:27, 2:60, 7:160, 26:63, 38:44, 8:12, 4:34, 47:4, and 37:93. Only two verses (i.e. 4:34 and 38:44) discuss the idea of wife-beating, while the rest of them are mentioned in different contexts and accordingly have different contextual meanings.

Verse Q 38:44 reads: *wa khudh biyadika dighthāan fāḍrib bihi wa lā taḥmath Innā wa Jadnāhu ṣābirāan ni'ma al-'abdu 'innahu 'awwābun.*

#### **Abdel Haleem's Translation**

"Take a small bunch of grass in your hand, and strike her with that so as not to break your oath (Note 15). We found him a patient in adversity; an excellent servant! He, too, always turned to God".

#### **George Sale's Translation**

"And We said unto him, take a handful of rods in thy hand, and strike thy wife therewith; and break not thine oath. Verily, We found him a patient person: How excellent a servant was he! For he was one who frequently turned himself unto Us."

This verse narrates a part of Prophet Job's story with his wife who insulted and blasphemed him (a kind of *nushūz*) during his long period of illness. Therefore, he swore to beat her with one hundred lashes if he recovered. After a very long time, he got recovered and wanted not to violate his oath, so God instructed him how to strike and discipline his wife. God instructed him to beat her by a bunch of grass to fulfill his oath. This is the pivotal point in this argument that the Qur'an explains itself; a very similar situation should be cross-referred to understand and link Q 4:34 with 38:44. Disciplining one's wife is very limited and conditioned (*ḍarb ghair mubarrih*) not to injure her to the point of breaking a bone, never use a stick nor a lash, and never slap her face. On the other side, one could 'spank', 'tap lightly' using a *siwāk* 'toothpick' just to warn her. The main moral message behind this divine order is just to warn one's wife and add levels to such problematic and quarreling matters that usually happen between husbands and wives. Understanding the deep message of marital hierarchy and spanking disobedient wives is crucially important not to think that the divine scripture encourages domestic violence against women as some scholars claim (Note 16).

#### **On Translating *wa 'aḍribūhunna* in Q 4:34**

Among those who seek to mitigate and retranslate the term *wa 'aḍribūhunna*, the uncommon translation is 'leave them', based on Q. 4:101, *idhā ḍarabtum fī'l-arḍi*, meaning 'if you travel'. Since this is the punishment for recalcitrant wives, and their recalcitrance consists of their refusal to have sex with their husbands, this interpretation makes more sense than 'have sex with them when they are willing', translated by some reformist scholars. On the other hand, Sale translates it as 'chastise them'. This archaic term 'chastise', according to Macmillan Dictionary, means "mainly journalism: to criticize someone" or "old-fashioned: to punish someone by hitting them" (Note 17). This is an open-ended punishment that could entail different kinds and colours of beating and criticism. In the same way, Sale renders the whole phrase in old-English, "But those, whose perverseness ye shall be apprehensive of, rebuke; and remove them into separate apartments, and chastise them." that does not flow well with modern TRs. Syntactically, he adds the coordinating conjunction *and* simultaneously which might be digested as applying the three possibilities at a time which is not the case in this vein. Also, he does not use any additional annotations to make it clearer to the TR. On the contrary, Abdel Haleem's translation 'then hit them' is literally and functionally acceptable as it cope with both the ST literal meaning and the common classical exegeses. What makes this translation more useful is the footnoted annotation and the in-text bracketed material which quickly facilitates the problematic term and refers the TR to extra resources to make use of them to understand the underlying meaning. Additionally, in his translation, "If you fear high-handedness from your wives, remind them [of the teachings of God], then ignore them when you go to bed, then hit them", Abdel Haleem uses a good consecutive linking adverb *then* to show the gradual process of the three steps admitted by many classical and modern exegetes. Confirming this point, Mahmaoud (2006:538) asserts that

The verse then turns to crisis and discipline, when a wife deviates from this norm by engaging in disobedience, and the measures that a husband should take to rectify the situation: reprimanding her, shunning her in bed, and beating her. Finally, the verse warns any husband against abusing a wife who ceases to disobey. A wife's return to the "fold of obedience" signals reconciliation and the husband can no longer deploy any disciplinary measures against her (Note 18).

### **Violence against women**

Many scholars and orientalists claim that wife-beating in Q 4:34 is an example of marital hierarchy, and husbands have superiority and the upper hand above their wives, but just like all rulers they are admonished to be just to those beneath them on the hierarchy. Others claim that it was a different moral code, that was not based on worldly equality, but rather based on worldly hierarchies. They focus on the violence against women in Islam and how miserable the Muslim woman is! However, the limitations and restrictions of applying the last resort of women's light beating, as shown above, and bearing in mind the Qur'anic example of Q 38:44 crystalizes that God's limits should not be violated. Therefore, any individual Muslim who does not adhere to these limits *must* be punished. Today's women are suffering due to *not* applying the limits set by God (i.e. Islamic law) which should not be transgressed by any Muslim. On the other hand, violence against women is a worldwide epidemic. Nazar and Kouzekanani (2007:642) statistically reports that:

Abuse by intimate male partners, known as domestic violence, and coerced sex have been studied in several countries .... Research on violence against women in all its forms continues to attract attention all over the world, as it has been a global problem. In New Zealand, for example, 20% of women reported having been hit or physically abused by a male partner. In Switzerland, 20% of women reported having been physically assaulted. In the United Kingdom, 25% of women had been punched or slapped by a partner or ex-partner in their lifetime. In Korea, 38% of wives reported being physically abused by their spouse in the previous year. In Egypt, 35 of women reported being beaten by their husband at some point in the marriage. In Nicaragua, 52% of women reported being physically abused by a partner at least once. In Mexico, 30% of women reported at least one episode of physical violence by a partner. Physical assault also has been widespread among women in the US. In short, violence against women is not confined to any particular political or economic system, but found in every society in the world (Note 19).

Applying a similar idea to that of Nazar and Kouzekanani, in the following lines the findings of a questionnaire conducted to 163 Saudi women will be demonstrated. The study reports on attitudes of a sample of 163 Saudi women towards women-beating in KSA. Four constructs will be investigated, namely: 1) *social aspects of violence against women*; 2) *socio-economic status/ educational aspects of violence against women*; 3) *preventive indicators of violence against women and*; 4) *physical aspects of violence against women*. The purpose of this survey is: (i) mainly to explore the attitudes towards violence against women in a sample of Saudi women; (ii) to examine their agreement on the physical disciplining as stated in Q 4:34; and (iii) to examine the educational, economic, and environmental differences in attitudes towards violence.

### **3. Analysis**

Table 1. Attitudes towards social aspects of violence against women construct

Item (mean)	Percentage of Agreement level		
	1	2	3
1. No objection to husband's continuously threatening wife with divorce	2.45%	3.06%	94.47%
2. The husband may reprimand his wife in public	1.84%	3.68%	94.47%
3. The man has the right to hit his wife in public	0%	1.22%	98.77%
4. The man has the right to hit his wife <i>harshly</i> indoor if he fears high-handedness from her	1.84%	8.58%	89.57%
5. The man has the right to hit his wife <i>lightly</i> indoor if he fears high-handedness from her	9.20%	31.28%	59.50%
6. It is better for wives to be insulted in foul language than hitting them	15.95%	41.71%	42.33%
7. It is better for wives to be hit rather than to be insulted in foul language	5.52%	7.97%	86.50%
8. Almost all women have been hit by a husband, a father, or a brother	21.47%	37.42%	41.10%
9. Disciplining-wives increases in rural families rather than urban ones	25.15%	49.07%	25.76%
<b>Average</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>20.40%</b>	<b>70.20%</b>
	<b>SD</b>	<b>19.10%</b>	<b>28.10%</b>

Note. Agreement level, 1= a great deal, 2= some, 3= not at all, Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Outcome Measures.

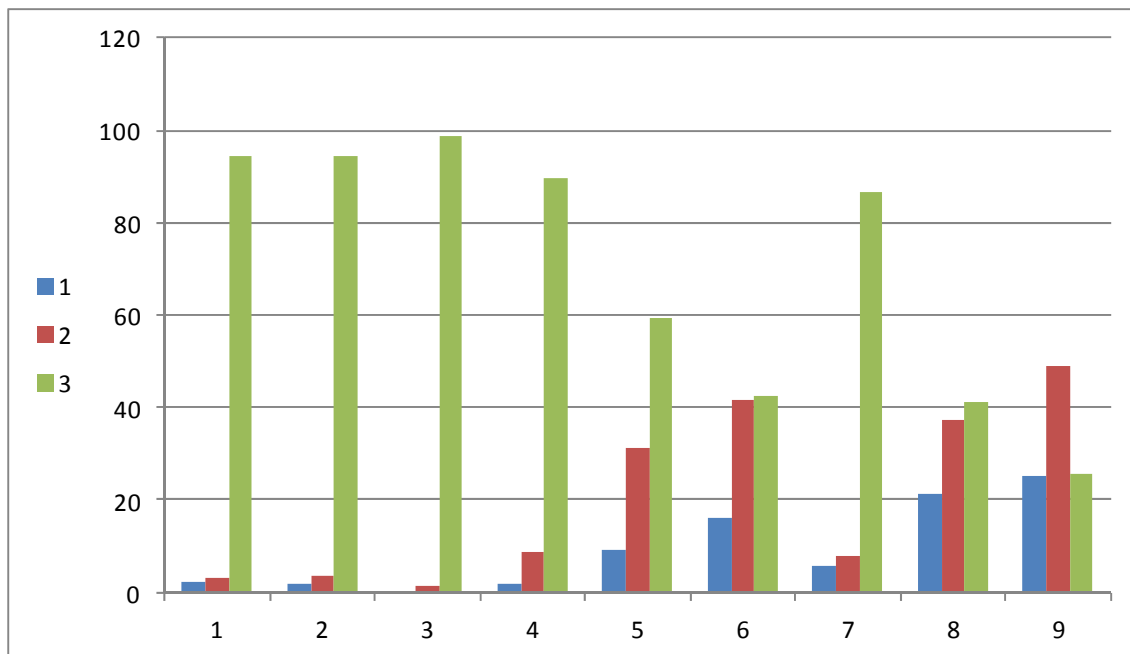


Figure 1. Attitudes towards social aspects of violence against women construct

The majority disagreed to be threaten or hit neither in public nor indoor by a man, especially the first four questions which recorded the peak of rejection; 94.47%, 94.47%, 98.77%, 89.57% respectively. Physical hitting is almost refused by women due to bad experience. However, the degree of hitting, which is relative, might count positively with some participants as demonstrated in the fifth question. Hitting lightly indoor to disobedient wives is even refused by 59.50%, but accepted to some extent by 40.48%. It is an evident that Qur'anic rules have a good impact on some participants. But the majority refuses any kind of disciplining showing a good indicator of some husbands' brutality and overuse of highhandedness. Many footnotes have been added by participants to indicate that they are not against the Qur'anic rules, but against their tough husbands and their overuse of power. On the other hand, verbal insulting in foul language is preferred rather than physical hitting by the majority 57.66% compared to 42.33% disagreed. This means that some participants would prefer to choose between worse and the worst for their convenience. Question 8 signifies that 41.10% of participants have not been hit by their families. Whereas in question 9, the majority states that wife-beating increases in rural families rather than urban ones. This means that violence against women occurs frequently among rural families more than urban ones.

Table 2. Socio-economic status \ educational aspects of violence

Item (mean)	Percentage of Agreement level			
	1	2	3	
10. Physical violence increases with couples who are less educated	32.51%	48.46%	19.01%	
11. Physical violence increases in lower-income families	20.24%	39.87%	39.87%	
12. Verbal abuse increases in lower-income families	23.31%	35.58%	41.10%	
13. Disciplining wives increases with audacious and/or stubborn women	36.80%	49.69%	13.49%	
14. Disciplining wives increases with less educated couples	26.99%	38.03%	34.96%	
<b>Average</b>	<b>M</b>	27.90%	42.30%	29.60%
	<b>SD</b>	6.70%	6.30%	12.60%

Note. Agreement level, 1= a great deal, 2= some, 3= not at all. Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Outcome Measures.

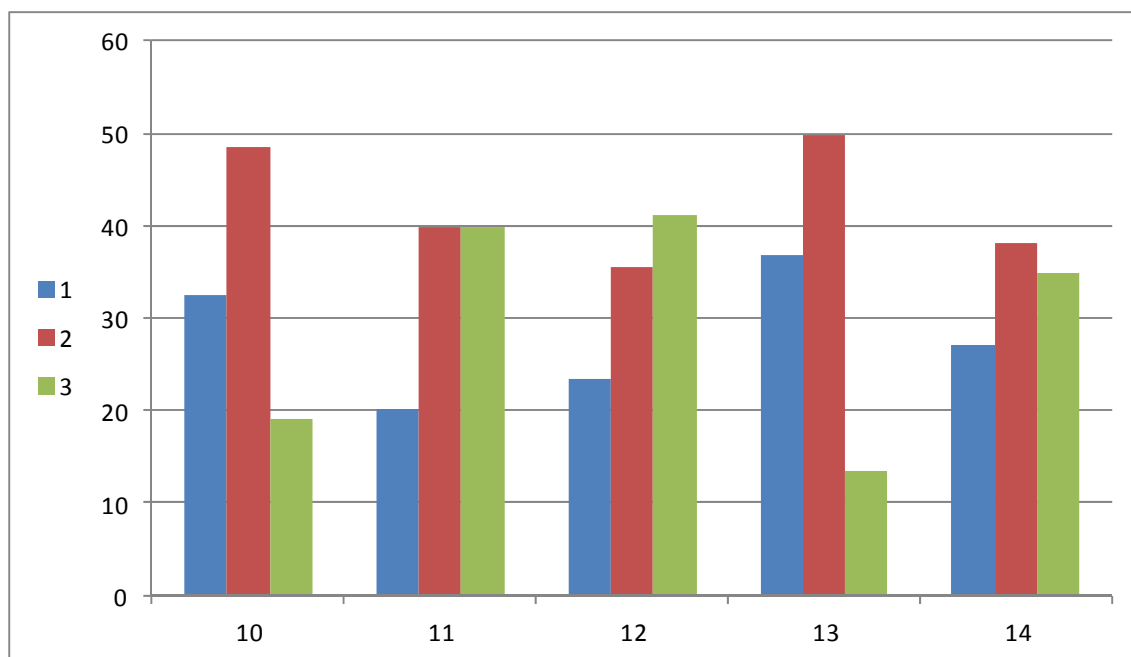


Figure 2. Socio-economic status \ educational aspects of violence

The socio-economic and educational statuses show a significant approval in all questions, especially questions 10 and 13. High education plays a pivotal role on how men deal with women, how husbands deal with audacious wives, and even how poor family members deal with each other. The economic status is less significant than the educational one due to adherence to the religious roles as well as the common customs.

Table 3. Preventive indicators of violence

Item (mean)	Percentage of Agreement level			
	1	2	3	
15. Physical violence against woman (wife, daughter, sister) decreases in conservative/religious families.	38.65%	47.23%	14.11%	
16. Verbal abuse against woman (wife, daughter, sister) decreases in conservative/religious families.	34.96%	55.82%	9.20%	
17. Wife-beating decreases with religious and/or obedient wives.	41.71%	44.78%	13.49%	
18. Wife-beating decreases with highly-educated wives.	37.42%	38.03%	24.53%	
<b>Average</b>	<b>M</b>	38.10%	46.40%	15.30%
	<b>SD</b>	2.80%	7.30%	6.50%

Note. Agreement level, 1= a great deal, 2= some, 3= not at all. Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Outcome Measures.

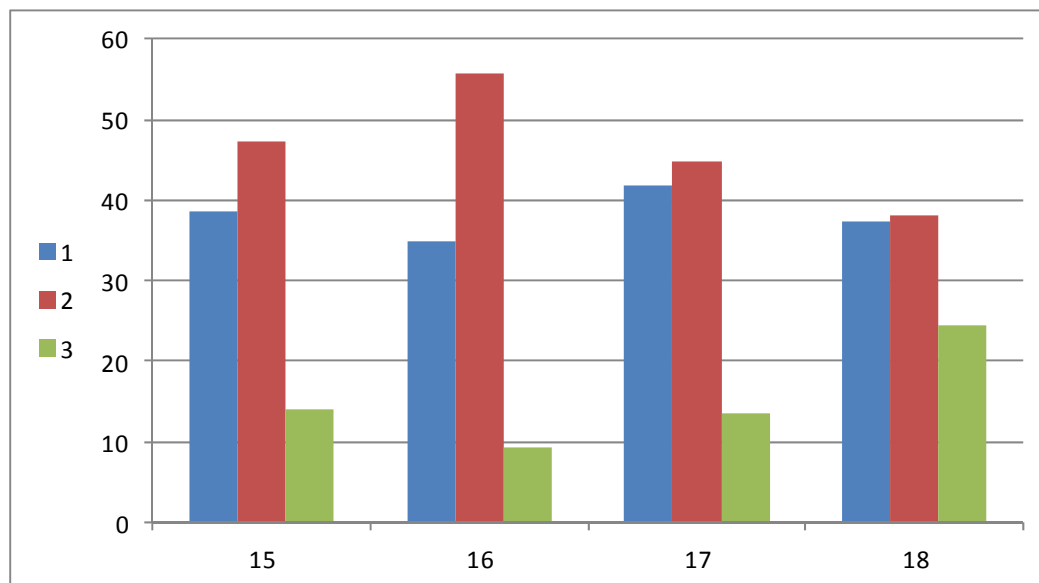


Figure 3. Preventive indicators of violence

The four questions are approved by the majority indicating that verbal or physical violence occur less among conservative and/or religious families. If the first two levels of agreement (1 and 2) are added and considered as a relative approval, the percentages of acceptance will be 85.88%, 90.78%, 86.49%, and 75.45% respectively.

Table 4. Physical aspects of violence

Item (mean)	Percentage of Agreement level		
	1	2	3
19. The man has the right to forbid the wife from working.	12.26%	30.67%	57.05%
20. The man has the right to impose any type of job on the wife.	9.20%	33.12%	57.66%
21. The woman (wife, daughter, sister) will always be inferior to the man regardless of her accomplishments.	15.33%	26.38%	58.28%
22. The man has the right to curse at the woman (wife, daughter, sister) if he deems it necessary.	4.29%	9.81%	85.88%
23. The man has the right to hit the woman (wife, daughter, sister) if he deems it necessary.	5.52%	19.63%	74.84%
24. The man has the right to slap the woman's (wife, daughter, sister) face to discipline her.	1.22%	3.06%	95.70%
25. No objection to hitting a woman (wife, daughter, sister) if she becomes audacious.	15.95%	30.67%	53.37%
26. The husband has the right to force his wife to meet his needs against her desire.	4.29%	19.01%	76.68%
27. The husband has the right to use religion as means to force his wife to meet his needs	23.31%	41.10%	35.58%
28. The husband has the right to choose between admonishing, stunning from bed, or hitting his wife if she is disobedient.	29.44%	34.96%	35.58%
29. The husband has to use first admonishing, then stunning from bed, and lastly hitting his wife if necessary	38.03%	41.10%	20.85%
30. I do not mind to be hit by my husband if he fears high-handedness from me	2.45%	19.63%	77.91%
<b>Average</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	
	13.40%	25.70%	60.70%
	11.60%	11.80%	22.40%

Note. Agreement level, 1= a great deal, 2= some, 3= not at all. Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Outcome Measures.



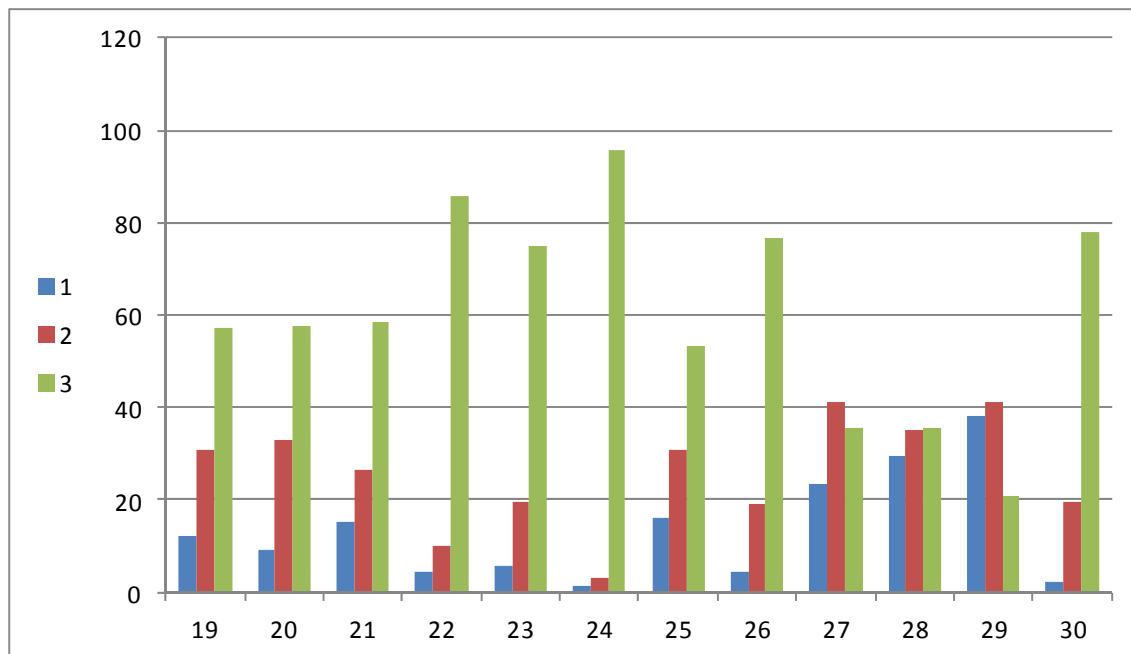


Figure 4. Physical aspects of violence

Most questions of the physical aspects of violence construct have been refused by the majority, especially question 24 which records the peak of refusal 95.70% showing that slapping a women's face is the most humiliating. However, questions 27, 28, and 29 record a significant approval by the majority, 64.41%, 64.4%, and 79.13% respectively. The results of these three questions are very significant for this study showing how participants (i.e. women) accept the Qur'anic ruling of (Q 4:34), but reject the subjective application of its meaning. Subjectively, some husbands determine the meaning of wife-beating as well as the degree of beating and which option of the three they prefer to commence with. The majority of participants 79.13% believe in the divine hierarchy of the three rulings, first admonishing; then stunning from bed; and lastly hitting his wife lightly if necessary. Surprisingly enough, on the other hand, the refusal percentage 77.91% of question 30 which might explain the negative backgrounds and nightmares narrated by friends and watched on the Media about brutal husbands hit their wives.

### 3. Findings

Based on the participants' responses to the 30 items, a mean score, ranging from one to three, was computed for each construct as shown above in tables. The survey on violence against women has generally shown that women are more likely to reject any kind of physical disciplining, even if it was light. They usually think they are victims to the brutality of husbands. The pivotal source and support behind this negative thinking is the Media. Also, the environmental differences played a significant role in directing the participants to answer the questions of the survey. Those from rural areas agreed on some questions and ideas that were totally rejected by those from urban areas. Obedience and mutual understanding are the price to be paid by couples to avoid either verbal or physical disciplining, however light.

### 4. Discussion of Findings

This article has stressed the explanation of Q 4:34 in the light of Q 38:44. This cross-reference has answered a very important question that is always raised by many contemporary scholars and orientalist (i.e. to what extent are husbands permitted to physically discipline their wives?) Accordingly, Q 38:44 gives a good example of light beating (*ḍarb ghair mubarrih*) in which Prophet Job's story with his wife was narrated. Job's wife insulted and blasphemed him (a kind of *nushūz*) during his long period of illness. Therefore, he swore to beat her with one hundred lashes if he recovered. After a very long time, he recovered and wanted not to violate his oath, so God instructed him how to strike and discipline his wife. God instructed him to beat her by a bunch of grass to fulfill his oath. This story shows how husbands are warned and prohibited from transgressing God's limits, not to

injure her to the point of breaking a bone, never use a stick nor a lash, and never slap her face. Alternatively, one could 'spank', 'tap lightly' using a *siwāk* 'toothpick' just to warn his wife.

On the other hand, the empirical survey conducted on 163 Saudi women shows a general disagreement among women to be hit under any conditions. However, for some questions the majority agreed to be lightly hit if they committed *nushūz*. The economic, social, and educational statuses have very significant impacts on the violence against women in the East.

## 5. Conclusion

Three divine ascending steps, i.e. first admonishing, then stunning from bed, and lastly hitting lightly if necessary, are established to be applied very carefully and gently not to be misused by men. This careful application is accepted by the majority of participants 79.13% in this survey. Meanwhile, those who rejected the application of this divine rule might have experienced a very bad, i.e. brutal, application of beating. The individual differences and application and the subjective interpretation constitute the core problem that resulted in such huge literature and debates of the intended meaning of wife-beating in Q 4:34. Accordingly, many scholars build up their arguments on the so called brutal Qur'anic ruling of (Q 4:34) which deprives women from their elementary human right, not to be bitten. The results and findings of this empirical survey run against many claims of licensed violence against Muslim women.

In a similar vein, Mahmaoud (2006:549-550) in his conclusion reports that Qur'anic text does not include the measure of wife-beating in Q 4:34.

Since the measure could not have been "edited out" of the Qur'anic text, the next best achievable step was to "bracket" it. This "bracketing," in turn, generated two competing readings: one which stressed the light and lenient nature of beating a wife who commits *nushūz*, and a more radical reading that rejected any physical abuse against women and effected a virtual abrogation of the beating measure (Note 20).

Textually, Q 38:44 determined and showed how leniently wives should be physically disciplined, as the last resort, if they committed *nushūz*. Contextually, Q 4:35 crystalizes the progression of the dispute. If the three options in Q 4:34 were adopted but the disagreement is still alive, a system of arbitration (i.e. Q 4:35) would be organized to be worked out. Together, the textual and contextual analysis of Q 4:34 would thus hopefully propose a new reading of the concept of women-beating in the ever glorious Qur'an.

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## Notes

Note 1. *bi* is interpreted as instrumental rather than causal.

Note 2. *bi* is interpreted as instrumental rather than causal.

Note 3. The verb *nashaza* from which *nushuz* is derived means ‘to become high’, ‘to rise’.

See also verse 128 where the same word is applied to husbands. It applies to a situation where one partner assumes superiority to the other and behaves accordingly.

Note 4. “This signifies a single blow, as is clear from the circumstances of the revelation of this verse. See also Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qurʾan*, 46-54”.

Note 5. Adopted with major modifications to cope with the present survey form Fatima Nazar and Kamiar Kouzekanani “Attitudes towards Violence against Women in Kuwait”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 61. No. 4 (Autumn, 2007), pp. 641-654, esp. 645-649.

Note 6. Abdel Haleem, M. A. S. (2004). *The Qurʾan: A New Translation*. London: Oxford University Press (p.54).

Note 7. Abī Ḥayyān, M. (d. 754 H). *Tafsīr al-Bahāʾ al-muhīṭ* <http://www.altafsir.com/>. Last accessed date: 02.05.14.

Note 8. To have the option to apply whatever you like from the three recommendations first or to apply all of them at a time.

Note 9. To be restricted to follow the divine order of recommendations; not to move from option 1 to option 2 unless option 1 proves its failure and the same is applied to options 3 accordingly.

Note 10. Mohamed Mahmoud “To Beat or Not to Beat: On the Exegetical Dilemmas over Qurʾan, 4:34” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126, no. 4 (October-December 2006): 537-551, esp. 538.

Note 11. *Ibid.*, 540

Note 12. Al-Rāzī, Tafsir, <http://www.altafsir.com/>

Note 13. Muhammad A. A. Taghian. (2013). *Translating Qurʾānic Mutashābihāt: A Linguistic Approach*. Germany: Lap Lambert.

Note 14. Abdel Bāqī, M. F. (2001). *Al-Muʾjam al-mufahras li-alfāz al-Qurʾān al-karīm*. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth.

Note 15. “Qurʾanic commentators explain that, when his wife blasphemed, Job swore that if he recovered from his illness, he would beat her with one hundred lashes. When he recovered, however, he regretted his hasty oath, so God gave him this instruction”.

Note 16. See for example Ayesha Chaudhry, “The Dilemma of the Prophetic Example and the Qurʾanic Injunction on Wife-Beating”, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 2011, JRE 39.3: 416-439.

Note 17. See <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/>

Note 18. Mohamed Mahmaoud, “To Beat or Not to Beat: On Exegetical Dilemmas over Qurʾan, 4:34,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126, no. 4 (October-December 2006), 537-551, esp. 538.

Note 19. Fatima Nazar and Kamiar Kouzekanani “Attitudes towards Violence against Women in Kuwait”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 61. No. 4 (Autumn, 2007), pp. 641-654, esp. 642-643.

Note 20. Mohamed Mahmaoud, “To Beat or Not to Beat: On Exegetical Dilemmas over Qurʾan, 4:34,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126, no. 4 (October-December 2006), 537-551, esp. 549-550.

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