

Caring Communities: Taking on Gender- Based Violence

*Final Report
Cohort 1*



BAYAN



HEART

"I believe that this course was exactly what I needed, at the exact moment it was necessary for my community. We are struggling with issues of spiritual abuse and I feel like I have been armed with the knowledge I need to speak to it with confidence and competence."

- Bayan cohort 1 course participant

In 2020, Bayan Islamic Graduate School partnered with HEART to co-create a 12-week online course titled “Caring Communities: Taking on Gender-Based Violence,” to offer leaders in our communities an opportunity to develop shared language to begin addressing gender-based violence in Muslim communities and workplaces. This course aimed to deepen the capacity of imams, chaplains, community leaders, and others working in Muslim communities. This fully-online course is the first of its kind, bringing together the knowledge, expertise and wisdom of scholars, leaders, and experts in various domains who are involved in educating communities about the dynamics, impacts, and implications of gender-based violence for maintaining trust, accountability and safety within our communities. The course identified key principles that Muslims should uphold when crafting community spaces, adhere to when investigating incidents that are reported to have occurred, and implement when performing due diligence and demonstrating transparency in the pursuit of justice for victims.

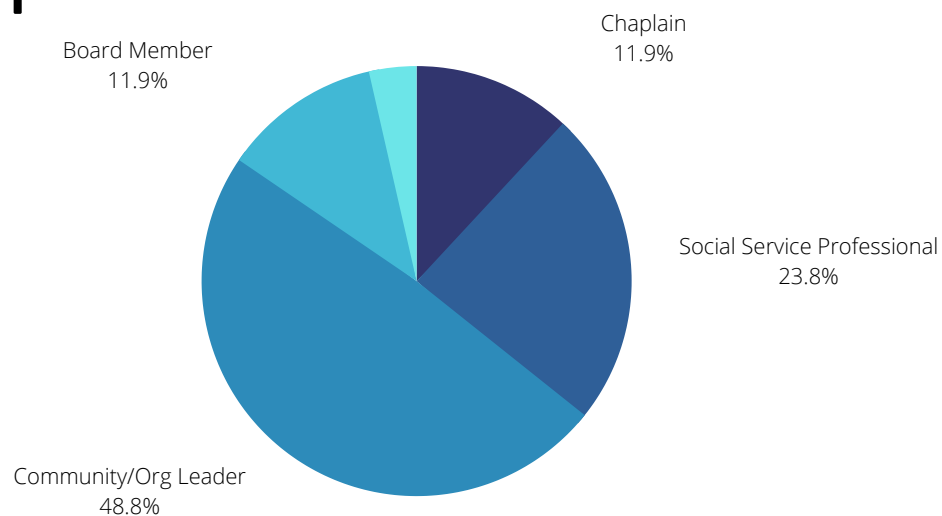
The goals of this course were the following:

- To develop a shared language and understanding of gender-based violence, and the scope of the problem
- To understand the root causes of gender-based violence and barriers to disclosure and services
- To understand how to support victims of violence and build victim-centered spaces
- To explore a three-tiered framework to address gender-based violence at the individual, community and institutional levels
- To develop an action-plan to implement in their respective community that addresses and prevents GBV

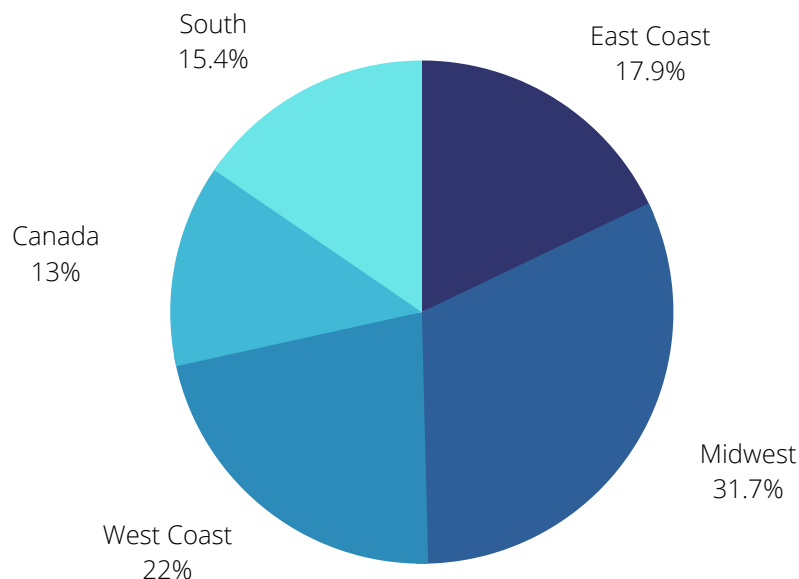
The Participants

Ultimately, we received more than 70 applications from around the world, including from Africa and Europe. The first cohort of 40 was recruited from US and Canada and represented a diverse range of professions, from healthcare and prison chaplains to case managers to imams, and also represented a wide range of geographic regions in North America.

Participants



Participant Locations



The Curriculum

The course was designed in partnership with HEART. The topics were determined as a way to build off each other and guest speakers were invited based on their expertise. Each module featured the following:

- Pework: this included various readings and videos to complete prior to attending the module
- Live session: Interactive two hour live virtual session via zoom featuring breakout rooms, role playing and case studies
- Homework: a brief homework assignment that gave students the opportunity to apply the content they learned in class

Course instructors included: Dr. Ingrid Mattson, the HEART team, Imam Mohamed Magid, Peaceful Families Project, Dr. Kameelah Rashad, and attorney Aisha Rahman, and course materials included videos and resources by Imam Omar Suleiman, Dr. Azizah al-Hibri, KARAMAH, Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, and many more. A brief outline of the sessions, instructors, and module objectives is provided in the table below.

Week 1: Islamic Perspectives on Gender-based violence

Week 2: Community Agreements

Week 3: What is Gender-based Violence?

Week 4: Debrief with Dr. Kameelah Mu'min Rashad

Week 5: Domestic Violence & Spiritual Abuse

Week 6: Root Causes of Gender-Based Violence & Barriers to Disclosure

Week 7: Gender-based violence & the Law

Week 8: Debrief

Week 9: Intersectionality & Impacts of Gender-based violence

Week 10: Responding to Disclosures & Victim-centered approaches

Week 11: Personal Action Plans

Week 12: Debrief with Dr. Kameelah Mu'min Rashad

Key Course Characteristics

There were a number of key characteristics to the course, such as the following:

- **Introduction of community agreements**, which is a set of shared agreements that offered participants a framework for how to interact with the course material
- Grounded in the lens of **public health prevention principles**, and focused on the **root causes of violence** as a mechanism to effectively prevent GBV
- The reframing and regrounding in **core Islamic concepts**, including, but not limited to, hurma (sacred inviolability), rahma (compassion), amanah (trust/responsibility), and adalah (justice)
- The commitment to **develop a shared language** around key concepts, including but not limited to, 'victim-centered,' 'trauma informed,' 'rape culture,' 'intersectionality' 'victim blaming,' 'spiritual abuse,' 'restorative + transformative justice,' and more.
- **Debrief sessions with Dr. Kameelah** to allow participants to process their emotions and discomfort that arises during their course participation.
- **Accountability pods** to build a community for participants to engage in a peer exchange and provide technical assistance to each other
- As part of their homework assignments, the participants also contributed to a **shared directory of resources, or a referral network**. This directory features hotlines, domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, legal aid clinics, and other social services by region.
- The **community action plans** consisted of first completing an internal assessment to identify gaps in the communities and organizations they work in, and then building a plan around those gaps using SMART goals

Program Evaluation

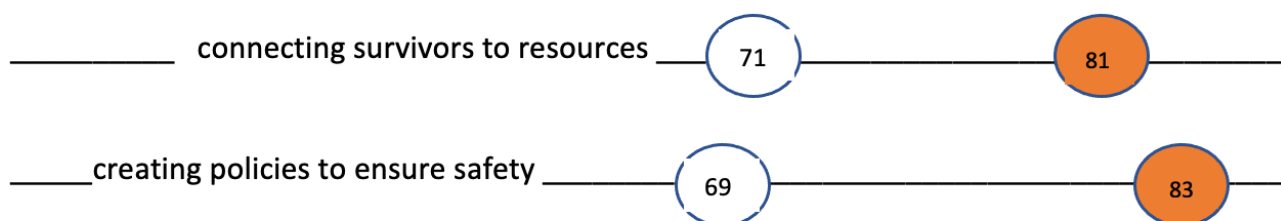
Course participants were asked to participate in numerous evaluation opportunities, including:

- A pre- and post-test with an anonymous unique identifier to gauge growth at the beginning and end of the course
- Post-module evaluations
- Three course check-ins in preparation for the mental health debrief sessions

The analysis moving forward will include only those responses that we were able to match both the pre and post test together (n = 28).

Participants were asked about their role in the communities that they live, work, and pray in, regarding aspects of gender-based violence. They were asked to respond to statements and agree or disagree on a likert scale. The two biggest indicators that changed were the statements “My responsibility as a [PRIMARY ROLE] includes: connect individuals impacted by GBV to resources in the community (pre test 71% post test 81.5%)” and “create policies that ensure the safety of survivors of GBV (69.5% pre test and 83.3% post test).”

Upon completion of the program, participants felt greater responsibility toward survivors by:

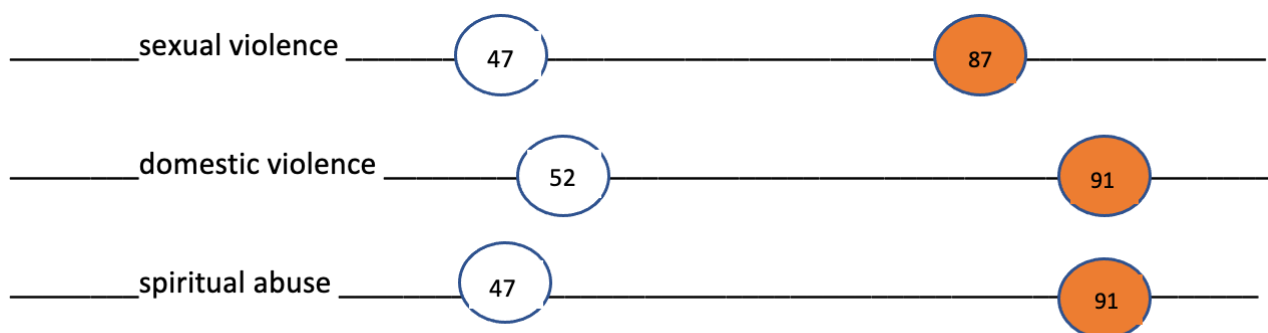


Program Evaluation

Participants were asked about how equipped they felt for a variety of scenarios, on the following likert scale: 1 - extremely unequipped 2 - moderately unequipped 3 - Slightly unequipped 4 - Somewhat equipped 5 - Extremely equipped.

As such, the analysis indicates a clear positive change in participants' self assessment about how equipped they were to address specific issues. For example, at the pre-test, **47.8% of participants shared they felt somewhat equipped or extremely equipped to support a community member that was seeking help for sexual assault compared to 87.5% at the post-test.** Moreover, 66% of participants moved up at least one point in the likert scale, and 33% moved up two or more points. Similarly, **52% of the participants and 47.8% of participants felt somewhat equipped or extremely equipped to support a community member that is seeking help for domestic violence and spiritual abuse, respectively, and 91% and 91.3%, respectively, at the post test.**

Upon completion of the program, participants reported feeling more equipped to support survivors seeking help for:

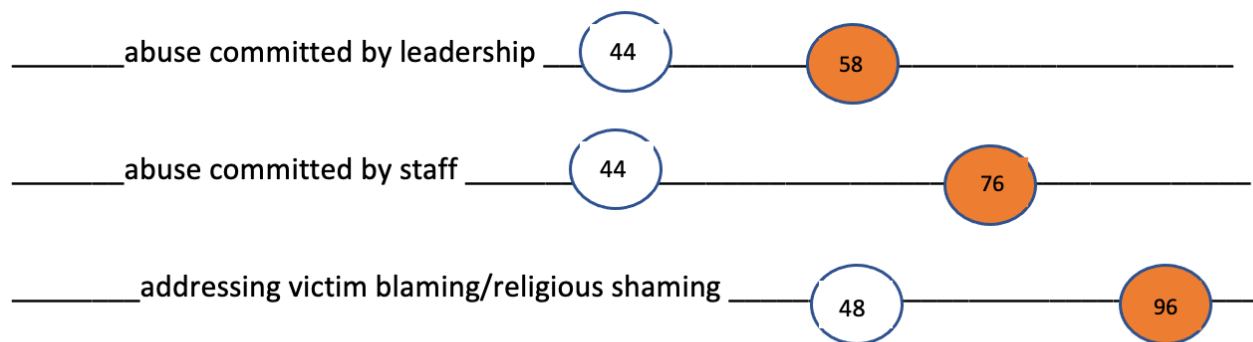


Program Evaluation

There were similar positive changes in participants' self assessment in addressing victim blaming with religious shaming, and abuse by staff and leadership. For example, at the pre-test, **48% of participants shared they felt somewhat equipped or extremely equipped to address victim blaming and religious shaming compared to 96% at the post-test.**

Similarly, **44% of the participants felt somewhat equipped or extremely equipped to address an occurrence of abuse committed by their staff, compared to 76% at the post test.** There were similar positive changes in participants' self assessment in addressing abuse committed by leadership.

Upon completion of the program, participants reported feeling more equipped to support community members seeking help for:



Taking into account the above quantitative analysis and the qualitative analysis we will share in the following sections, it is evident that this course was a timely opportunity, and very successful. The quantitative analysis above indicates clearly that course participants graduated with a greater understanding of gender-based violence, and feeling more equipped to respond to survivors and address gender-based violence in their communities and organizations.

Qualitative Findings

The following section will discuss key findings from the post-module and post-course evaluations. We will draw upon the rich testimonials and feedback that participants graciously offered in their anonymous surveys.

Trustbuilding and Relationship building

One of the first findings we want to uplift is the importance of trust and relationship building when convening a group of national leaders to discuss a nuanced and complex topic like gender-based violence. As such, **beginning with the introduction of community agreements was key to setting the tone for the course, introducing a way to think about GBV in a way that offers complexity and nuance, and build trust among the participants and facilitators.**

Participants also reflected on how they appreciated the application of community agreements to real life scenarios and how they planned to utilize the community agreements in their work moving forward. As one participant shared they found it valuable to “**identify community agreements within situations that is practiced or not practiced and how the lack of these causes more harm.**” Similarly, another participant shared “**I definitely enjoyed the interactive discussion and scenarios of each of the community agreements. Another big takeaway was the thoroughness of the extensive list of community agreements. I intend to share that list with my coworkers and influence our community engagement efforts.**”

"The biggest Ah-ha moment for me was learning the concept of simultaneity. While I have always had a bit of an understanding of the concept, having the name to put to it and understanding how we see it in practice when dealing with difficult and complex issues such as CIBV has really been eye opening for me to understand the importance of naming the complexities and holding space for realities that are sometimes conflicting and at odds. This will really help me in shifting my practice to be more trauma informed and account for the multi-layered nature of issues such as CIBV."

- Bayan cohort 1 course participant

Qualitative Findings

Alignment of GBV prevention to Islamic Values

An important aspect of this program was that it was a curriculum designed for Muslims by Muslims, and that it pulled key concepts and traditions from Islam to demonstrate that not only is the work of GBV aligned with Islam, but that it is an Islamic obligation to prevent GBV and the tradition offers tools to address GBV. One participant reflected that “the answers are in Islam, we just need to look from the nuance of our current lives.”

Importance of developing a shared language

This course was able to offer tangible solutions and make accessible these solutions for people who previously felt helpless. Developing a shared language is key to equipping people with the tools they need to do this work in their communities and being able to be comfortable with the complexity of this work. By introducing the community agreements as mentioned above, defining common terminology used in GBV in accessible and concrete ways, and explaining the spectrum of gender-based violence. One participant shared how their understanding of certain concepts was deepened: “Transformative justice is a newer concept for me. It made me think about accountability in a whole different way. I also have a much clearer understanding of confidentiality.” Another participant also shared their biggest takeaways:

“My biggest takeaway was learning the complexity involved in determining terms for identifying what covers different situations, which is a good thing to learn; my language skills in this field have grown far beyond my expectations; I now know so much more than I knew before and this was just the third class.”

"While I had knowledge of gender based violence prior to the course due to my professional role, the discussions in the course, and the information on the issue from an Islamic viewpoint has been helpful in allowing me to think about the topic at a deeper level and understand the complexity of the issue in terms of dealing with simultaneity, confidentiality, and navigating addressing harm in a legal framework that is riddled with sexism, racism and gendered Islamophobia."

- Bayan cohort 1 course participant

Qualitative Findings

The Importance of a Network and Peer learning

Another key result of this course was the network it has cultivated and that people feel less alone and siloed as they do this work. As one participant shared, the course “strengthened me because of the knowledge that there are so many other people in this same fight with me. Not being alone is a huge blessing.” Another shared:

“It has equipped me with knowledge, tools, resources and more importantly, a support network of outstanding committed Muslims doing the work who are resources in themselves. This course experience has empowered me to make more of an impact helping people than I could have made had I not gone through this course. At the end of the day, it is about helping people to help themselves.”

Participants also engaged in resource mapping in their local communities. This exercise allowed them to get familiar with the resources available in their local communities as they considered what kinds of partnerships they need to pursue. As one participant reflected: “I am aware of more resources and organizations in my own community after having to complete the community mapping assignment than I was before taking this course. This will help me when I have to make referrals or when I need to connect.”

Qualitative Findings

The Need for a structural analysis

Another key aspect of this course was that it focused on the root causes of gender-based violence and how that analysis is critical to adopting a prevention lens to address gender-based violence. Given that Muslim communities are the most diverse religious minority in North America and many Muslims are people of color, it was also important to incorporate an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach and an understanding of barriers to disclosure. In other words, it is critical to have an analysis that looks at GBV from a structural lens, and considers the intersections of racism, gender, misogyny, identity, etc can further create barriers to disclosure, justice, and healing. A participant shared that they believed that this was an important shift for their organization when they shared: “[the work of my organizations needs to shift more to the root causes instead of addressing gender based violence at the surface level.](#)”

Overall course impact

Overall, this course had a tremendous impact on participants, and it offered many self reflection opportunities. This ongoing practice of examining one's implicit biases, blind spots, and personal unresolved issues aids the individual in reducing the likelihood of harming the one they are serving; even if this harm unintentional. While the cohort of individuals participating in this cohort come from varied professional backgrounds, the debrief sessions offered an opportunity and facilitated space to center self-reflection, self-care and introspection as an important aspect of the learning process.

"I have learned much more about the prevalence and extent of DV and CiBV within Muslim communities, about the power and control factors that enable and/or perpetuate DV/CiBV, and about resources/strategies for dealing with DV and CiBV in a more proactive manner as opposed to merely reactive. I especially agree that Muslim leaders should pivot out of the cultural traps and treat DV/CiBV as a public health issue in order to circumvent a lot of taboos and open up the conversations much more broadly on community level."

- Bayan cohort 1 course participant

"My biggest takeaway from this module has been the wide gamut of barriers that exist when it comes to disclosure of sexual abuse. The fact that a person who is a victim of abuse can have other aspects of power exercised against them ranging from immigration issues all the way to isolation from family and friends. The fact that there is also marginalization of folks based on skin color within the extended family or socioeconomic status leading to victimization. Those same people end up losing their voices when it comes to disclosure because of a history of marginalization. These are dynamics that are not the topics of conversations in our families. And perhaps that is what needs to change.

- Bayan cohort 1 course participant

Overall Impact

“This course has had an immense impact on me on various levels. In my professional role as a child protection worker, hearing the discussions and reading material around concepts such as restorative justice, simultaneity, fear of law enforcement due to institutionalized racism, I have developed a critique of my own position as an agent of an organization that can perpetuate discrimination and work in a way that is not trauma informed and does not hold space for restorative justice or consideration for racism and systemic oppression in supportive survivors. On a personal level this course has really reaffirmed my understanding of our faith as a tradition rooted in mercy and justice. I have been so inspired by the information, resources, approach and leadership of the course and the creators and facilitators and guests. I have really developed an understanding of how to do GBV work that is rooted in healing for the individual harmed, and healing and support for our community to become rooted in healing, mutual support and accountability. As a member of my Muslim Community, my participation in the course has given me so much hope that we can create communities that are rooted in support for survivors in a way that accounts for the stigma around doing GBV work and how to address the use of our religion as a weapon to silence victims, which is actually spiritually abusive and goes against the tenants of our faith. I appreciate the creation of the local resources list, the pods and the community action plan as they have all ensured that we end the course with a clear vision on how to move forward so that our learning goes beyond the space we have shared.” - Bayan cohort 1 participant

“The information, discussions and interactions (for the most part) were all very textured, accessible and enriching. In candid honesty, having been working from a certain plateau, some of the responses to information in discussion were probably the most leveling ah-ha moments of illumination and a reminder of the necessity of courses like this.”

Action Plans

Throughout the course, students were given homework assignments to demonstrate their learnings. A particular highlight of this work was resource directory of local social services and hotlines across the country and Canada. The participants also had to create a final action plan, summarizing how they planned to continue this work moving forward. They formed accountability pods to brainstorm successful projects and submitted a plan using SMART goals, while also thinking about equity and inclusion. Participants also had to create a personal resource map - the inner circle representing their trusted partners and accountability partners, and the outer circles representing local social services organizations they could reach out to for more help or referral members to. Some key highlights for the action plan are below:

- Continued professional development for themselves and their staff and board
- Increased community education
- Commitment to equity and inclusion
- Facilitating policy change
- Strengthening organizational partnerships
- Developing survivor support programs, including raising money for financial support for survivors.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Caring Communities course led by Bayan Institute in partnership with HEART was an overwhelming success with exciting implications for its future. This first iteration of the course trained forty imams, chaplains, and community leaders from across the United States and Canada to deepen their understanding of how to address and prevent gender-based violence in their community and institutional spaces. Because of this course, this inaugural cohort has developed a shared language, skills, and most importantly, a network to continue this work in their local communities and institutions. As they execute their action plans in their local communities, the impact of this increased knowledge is exponential and these individuals will become agents of change in their own communities. This pioneering course has laid a foundation for continued iterations and a call for future cohorts - and we look forward to answering that call.