

'It's OK for Muslim men to hit their wives'



Reem Allouche, left, and Atika Latifi at the conference.

Caroline Overington, Richard Ferguson, *The Australian*, 12:00AM April 13, 2017

Muslim men are allowed to hit their wives — but only gently, and not with fists, instead using short sticks and pieces of fabric, according to a new video produced by the Australian women's branch of radical Islamic political movement Hizb ut-Tahrir.

The video, posted to Facebook by the Women of Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia, features a Muslim woman, who identifies herself as Sydney primary-school teacher Reem Allouche, demonstrating the appropriate ways by which Muslim men may discipline their disobedient wives.

REACTION: The Coalition and Labor unite to condemn the video.

She says the "hitting" must be done in a "managed way" with a short stick, a twisted scarf or a scrap of fabric. "It's symbolic," she says.

Domestic violence is 'not a beautiful blessing' A fellow panellist adds: "And a beautiful blessing."

Ms Allouche tells the audience of 26 veiled women in Sydney's west that Muslim husbands are in a leadership position in marriage and "it goes hand in hand that he would have the right to undertake disciplinary measures". Panellist Atika Latifi agrees: "He is permitted — not obliged, not encouraged — but permitted, to hit her. That is what everyone is talking about. It should not cause pain. Not harsh."

Ms Latifi then produces a "sivaak", a small stick, traditionally used for cleaning teeth. "I got one, because I wanted to show you, it's a stick, a small stick," she says, as Ms Allouche hits her with it. They then discuss other hitting devices, including "a coiled scarf" and "a folded handkerchief". "What kind of hitting is that, with a coiled scarf?" Ms Latifi says. Ms Allouche says: "We have a piece of fabric here, to demonstrate" and hits her again.

She adds: "It's very evident that this is symbolic in nature. And it's not what people have understood ... This is the reality of that disciplinary option." Ms Latifi says: "Striking should be done in such a way as not to cause harm or pain. It's a symbolic act."

Ms Allouche also asks: "What acts would require disciplinary measures? Committing sin?" Ms Latifi says: "Yes. And disobedience to the husband. Immoral acts or cheating. Admitting anyone to the home that the husband doesn't like."

Ms Allouche says: "So if the husband comes home and doesn't find that the wife has cooked dinner, that's not one of those acts?" Ms Latifi says: "No, it's not like a simple argument. These are serious things that can break up the family unit."

The women agree discipline is sometimes necessary to "promote tranquillity" in the family home.

Section 61 of the NSW Crimes Act (1900) and similar legislation in all states says common assault is an offence in Australia, regardless of whether serious harm is done. The video was shot during an all-women's event in Sydney's west following inflammatory comments by Muslim leader Keysar Trad, who argued that husbands could hit their wives "as a last resort" for disobedience.

No media were permitted.

In the video, Ms Allouche opens proceedings by acknowledging that Allah's teachings on discipline within marriage were often raised by those who wished to paint Islam as "barbaric, backward, and not applicable to modern times". "It appears to be an incitement to violence against women," Ms Allouche says. "It needs to be placed in context."

The event was originally scheduled for the Punchbowl Community Centre in Sydney's west but was moved at the last minute to a private hall in Lakemba. The Facebook page says the group had "a great turnout from our sisters ... considering change of location after having council issues with booked hall hire". A Canterbury-Bankstown council spokesman said Women of Hizb-ut Tahrir had had to change locations because the centre employee rostered on was sick and there was nobody else to open the doors.

The women on the panel agree that "Islam is not gender-biased". At the same time, they acknowledge that a Muslim wife is not given the option to hit her husband, or refuse sex, only to "ask one of the family members" for assistance in times of strife.

Ms Allouche says a husband might decide to hit his wife if she strayed from the teachings of the Koran, because "he loves his wife, he fears for his wife, it's almost a natural consequence". "You would expect that he would be taking some measures to help rectify the situation," she says.

"He's not responding through anger or frustration or rage; he's responding in obedience to Allah's commands, in a measured and staged way, because we know when people talk about violence against women, often it happens in the heat of the moment, in anger, in frustration and what-not, whereas here, it's managed."

In discussing the idea of assault as a last result, Ms Latifi says the Koran suggests "three measures" to deal with wayward wives: "Advise them first; leave them alone in bed; and hit them. It's simple: 'advise them' means explaining the rules of Allah, and encourage her to be obedient, and warn her against disobedience. If it produces the desired result, then all well, and all good. If it doesn't, then the other measure is husband can refuse to share the bed with her, not being intimate with her. "If this doesn't work, then the third measure that is permitted, not obliged, not encouraged, but he is permitted to hit her. And what a beautiful blessing, that he said not to take the steps at the one time, but one after the other.

“And what is the third option all about? What kind of hitting? It should not cause pain.”

The event was advertised as an “in-depth discussion” of the Islamic teaching known as Surah An-Nisa: 34, which outlines the right of a husband to “admonish (his wife) and abandon them in their beds, and hit them” if they stray from obedience.

The federal government considered banning the jihadist organisation, Hizb ut-Tahrir, in 2007 before deciding that it was not a terrorist organisation but a political group.