

Muslim World Forum – Member Care Forum

Member Care in the Muslim World

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Why do tentmakers distrust Member Care Providers?

- They are ignorant of and insensitive to the security issues of being in the 10/40 window
- They want to wrap people in cotton wool and are unwilling to let them take risks

Ajith Fernando in his book *An Authentic Servant* says:

“Christians from affluent countries may be losing their ability to live with inconvenience, stress and hardship, as there is more and more emphasis on comfort and convenience.....What will this mean for the church in the West? Might the West soon disqualify itself from being a missionary-sending region?”

This paper looks at:

- Women and Daughters
- Sexuality issues and singleness
- Teams
- Families
- Security and Risk
- Spiritual Oppression
- The Culture of Member Care

1 *Women and Daughters*

- Sexual harassment
- Self-esteem
- Identity
- Cultural realism

Sexual harassment

Emily Van Dalen in her excellent two-part article ‘Raising Radiant Daughters in Dark Places’, speaks of her own experience of growing up in the Muslim world, where she herself now raises daughters.

“A girlfriend and I are just rounding a corner in a crowded market place when out of nowhere a bicycle veers towards us and a man jeeringly reaches out and grabs my friend’s breast. Unbelievably, I remember the two of us actually walked on without even a break in our step. Our conversation continued with careful nonchalance. And never, ever, not in over 25 years to this day has it been remembered between us.”

If our daughters were being sexually abused we would act. Throughout the Muslim world through TV programmes, western girls are depicted as ‘fair game’. That perception is transferred to all women, even when they are appropriately dressed.

Too often when we send women into the Islamic world, we give the message – that’s how it is learn to live with it, almost a kind of fatalism. But what messages are women learning through such behaviour and the silence with which their experiences are so often greeted? Van Dalen identifies 5:

- **There is something wrong with being a woman. There is something wrong with me**
- **Sexual harassment occurs in so many subtle forms and with such frequency that it is a non-event and should just be got used to.**
- **There is no point in talking because nothing will ever change**
- **If I talk about it I'll be the one who gets the blame.**
- **Why talk? I won't be heard?**

Self-esteem

“Among my acquaintances are women ranging in age from 20 to 60, adult MKs raised in countries stretching from East Asia to the Middle East and North Africa. Many of them still silently agonize and struggle with doubts about their own value and personhood. I'm convinced that at least some of it is rooted in years of disparagement and sexual harassment that was never recognised or acknowledged. The stares, rude gestures, touches, pinches, jostles and jeers – what it means to be white, Western, young and vulnerable in an Islamic society.”

If the act is insignificant then so am I. Islamic culture and its view of women is touted in the West as being very high but the experience in the Muslim world is the very opposite.

- Women are deficient – morally, spiritually, physically, intellectually.
- They are inherently weak and a dangerous entrapment for men. They are the last to receive food and medical help.
- Girl babies are a disappointment – beatings have hit the news recently.
- Many of the Muslim societies are becoming ever more conservative and this is a growth area in missions – how much time do we spend pre-field in teaching women what they can expect and helping them develop strategies to deal with it?

Lowered self-esteem can bring on depression. It is particularly hard for single women and teenage daughters if their feelings are not listened to on this subject – and who is going to do the listening for a single woman? Are parents so absorbed in their ministry that they fail to hear the often unspoken cry of their daughters? Even husbands are not always sensitive to what their wives are going through. How alert are mission agencies and sending churches?

Female identity

A mother took her teenage daughter to see the doctor. He asked, 'Have you been living in an Islamic country?' 'Yes, how did you know?' 'Since your daughter came in she has not made eye contact with me, her shoulders are hunched, her chest is concave – she is doing everything she can to disguise her femininity'.

How can we nourish and encourage our own and our daughters' unique female identity? How can we help them to be proud of their bodies and not to despise them? Van Dalen suggests

- Biblical female identity – stories of women in the Bible and strong biographies
- Having 'culture breaks', time when you go somewhere where you can indulge your western cultural identity and you can act and dress as a westerner.
- Having areas of the house which are private to the individual or family, where you do things like aerobics, wear shorts, dance and sing. All these things make transitions back to the passport country easier too.
- Fathers, too, play a key role in affirming their daughters' and their wives' female identity. It is very important for fathers to find significant ways of spending time with their daughters in a country where different sex relationships are frowned upon once a child reaches puberty.

Cultural realism

- Blinkers - sometimes we are so keen to affirm the new culture that we are blind to its faults.
- We need to know and teach the local attitudes towards women and sexuality. And we need to remember that it is not just girls who are pinched or fondled – it can happen to boys too. There are tales of boys being propositioned.
- Women need to be able to identify culturally appropriate relational boundaries. We need to know how to say no.
- Enlisting the help of a national can be invaluable. Many of them disapprove of what happens – they would not want it to happen to their women and may be able to advise of ways of dealing with the harassments.

2 *Sexuality issues and singleness*

This combined title is not to say that sexuality is *only* an issue for singles nor that sexuality is the *only* issue for singles. The whole area of sexuality is an area for concern. A WEF Study on adjustment and spirituality among missionaries in 1987 found:

- The majority reported regular frustration and discouragement, over 20% resorted to using tranquillisers
- The greatest areas of spiritual struggle were maintaining a successful devotional time, experiencing a sense a spiritual victory and managing feelings of sexual lust.

Christians are incredibly naïve over their vulnerability to sexual temptation. Ken Williams in his article 'Sexual Purity in Missions' says :

"We don't fall into sin; we slide into it."

Never underestimate the danger of loneliness, overwork, lack of support. The following were identified in a study recently as factors increasing the vulnerability:

- Loneliness – according to professionals, isolation and loneliness were the most significant factors in cross-cultural missionaries disposing them to sexual temptation. Gen X are used working in groups with peer support. 69% of single women stated loneliness as a point of vulnerability in sexual temptation. Several mentioned the temptation to seek inappropriate relationships with nationals of the opposite sex as a means of dealing with the loneliness they experienced in a cross-cultural mission setting.
- Overwork – busyness of tentmaking, ministry, family, life style, absence due to work of husband
- Cultural differences – in sexual behaviour and expression, not reading the signs
- Lack of accountability – within the team or organization or any personal line of accountability
- Close team work – for both men and women, single and married
- Being 'the exotic other' – more attractive to the national as a 'spiritual/mystery' person
- Lack of preparation – awareness of issues, personal weaknesses, hidden issues

What does a young man do in a situation where he is isolated, depressed, friendless, and a good-looking national befriends him and makes him feel valued and loved? Sally Smith who works for UN AIDS and set up an Aids project in Nepal asks the question, 'When will we consider arming our young single people with condoms?' How does that square with our theology? Is prevention better than cure?

- There is a growth of Internet pornography among ministers and missionaries. That is not just among single people. Single people are particularly prone to temptation either with Internet pornography or with inappropriate relationships because of the pressure of a very sexual society but also because of the loneliness. In a survey 42% of married men and 33% of single men admitted having used pornography in the previous 3 years . Covenant eyes is an internet accountability service.
- Do we recognise the serious threat of temptation? We need to be aware of the background that folk come *from* as well as the situations they are going *into*.
- Theo van der Weele suggests a 'sexuality interview' as part of the acceptance procedure for cross-cultural missions.
- These issues need to be addressed at selection and orientation. A two-hour seminar on marriage at orientation is not sufficient for dealing with issues of sexuality. Ken Williams' article 'Sexual Purity in Missions' in DMCW has some helpful insights and questionnaires.
- Boundaries of behaviour and working relationships need to be set down clearly in teams
- Accountability needs to be set down – part of an annual appraisal, confidentiality guaranteed, people trained to deal with sexuality issues, questionnaires can be prepared

3 Team Issues

- Relationship building. Agencies and churches have to deal seriously with the question 'What does it mean to be team?' Those who go into the Muslim world are often very driven people, very task-focussed and not very good on relationship building. Moreover, with their tentmaking jobs there is not much time for team life as well as family life and socialising. So how can they support each other? What should be the expectations? What sort of covenants should teams enter into at the start of their ministry? How can they be encouraged to vary that when situations change, new members come?
- Pastoral Skills - When there is not access to pastoral care, through the church for instance, then teams need to ensure they have that skill on board.
- What should a team consist of? Are there dangers in single sex teams? Some years ago a team composed of only women was working with Muslim refugees in a European city, they had had virtually no training in Islamics, thought it was wonderful that the men who came for clothing to the store they ran, wanted to spend so much time over coffee with them. One ended up renouncing her faith and marrying a Muslim. How well defined are the boundaries where singles are serving alongside married couples?
- What about scattered teams – where there is one unit at some distance from the rest of the team and they get together once every two months if they are lucky? Is that sustainable in personal terms? What extra support can the agency put in place? What conditions should be laid down to such a placement? Is it just in the decision making of the individual or is there a requirement that a regular break is taken?
- With many workers coming from the New Sending Countries, there are language issues which make them isolated and they may be the only people of their language group in a team

4 Families

- Education - schooling, support when using the national system, both academic and faith-wise if children are being educated in an Islamic system.
- Sexuality - Being aware of sexuality issues as they pertain to family. In some Asian countries the way to soothe babies to sleep is to masturbate them. Who is watching

the children? Parents need to be alerted to take care over baby-sitting and child-minding duties. Elsewhere, boys are disciplined by being touched on their genitalia. Parents need to know the signs of sexual abuse so that they can spot them and deal with the situation. Another issue is that even the older boys who could "look after themselves" are growing up in a negative and unnatural atmosphere where the society around them hammers home the point that they view women and girls as lesser beings

- Security - – will they spill the beans?
- Roles of wives - mother, discipler, evangelist, hospitality, - who do they identify with?
- Role/Identity of Husbands – witness, work, dual roles – husband/parent, dual identity – tentmaker/missionary
- Issues for children
 - A lifetime of being viewed as an object of temptation. As early as 8 or 9, even when completely covered in culturally appropriate attire, girls experience being jeered, touched and pinched. Boys may also be an object for abuse, the object of sexual favours in a sex-segregated society
 - A constant feeling that you are a target – because you are different
 - Hiding behind walls and veils to avoid prying eyes.
 - Living in dangerous cities where crime is rampant and riots, kidnappings or muggings could take place at any time.
 - Growing up feeling intimidated by forceful adults and older children
 - Living with surveillance – phone tapping, watching what you say, Knowing that you could have to leave at very short notice and having the bags packed ready to do so if needed

5 **Security and Risk**

- Where do we stand on the whole security and risk continuum? What about living in a Red Zone? The Muslim world is particularly vulnerable in the wake of 9/11, the Palestinian situation etc. The issue of the persecuted church matters here – people dealing with guilt if they leave in a time of trouble.
- I don't think member care is about wrapping people up in cotton wool, but it is about making sure they make informed decisions, its about giving them the tools and skills to cope in a stressful environment. It's about helping them to maintain their spiritual walk, to have the right life/work balance so that family life doesn't suffer.
- The question is not how do we eliminate risk from our lives but how do we evaluate risk and train and equip people to manage risk. And I don't think there is much on offer in the missions' community to do that. What programmes do people use? What resources are available out there?
- Security issues for MC workers – are we sensitive to words etc when communicating with those in the Muslim world? Patrick Lai identified 6 areas:
 - 1 Emails and letters – the words you use
 - 2 Your own email address – is it secure?
 - 3 Phone calls
 - 4 Websites – what they say about you!
 - 5 Your passport information
 - 6 Documents you carry around

6 **Spiritual oppression**

- The prevalence of Folk Islam - Folk Islam uses all sorts of practices to harness spiritual power in a religion which is basically fatalistic and in which people have no control over their lives and their destinies. Folk Islam gives them that power and it is particularly powerful within the community of women.
- As Westerners we are often sceptical about such things but mission workers in the Muslim world need to be educated on these issues because it will affect them, not just

in their ministry but in their personal lives, well-being and that of their families. Bill Musk's book 'The Unseen Face of Islam' is still a classic on the subject. Teasing out the spiritual issues within a situation can help resolve what are the real problems that people are facing.

- Occult involvement needs to be addressed at selection because it makes someone vulnerable to spiritual attack.
- Adequate Bible training needs to be given in Spiritual warfare
- There needs to be pre-field training in the areas of Folk Islam and spiritual oppression
- Workers need the tools to handle ministry in an area of spiritual oppression – practical and personal skills in preventative care as well as tackling the problems/people they encounter
- Spiritual survival tools – the means to strengthen their own life.
- Team training – teams need to be empowered and agreed on how they will deal with spiritual attack

7 The Culture of Member care

- Old and New sending countries have a different perspective on member care – we step in much earlier. Expectations differ as what a 'normal' life is.
- The whole area of mobile care is being investigated. There are plans for a mobile member care team to Central Asia, and another for North Africa, in addition to the NAP which already exists. The group from the Middle East was also interested in that option.

“Our soldiers fighting the hottest part of the battle and getting wounded by direct, fierce and frequent satanic attack must have the care they need. I speak of pastoring. But a special kind of pastoring. The couples (who went home) were a regular part of a fellowship of expatriates in a country where even non-Christian expatriates huddled together in a church for cultural bonding and uplifting. Fellowship and pulpit pastoring and professional counselling were available. But this was not the answer it might be back in Ohio. And they were well pastored in the community sense. But what does appear to be the answer, based on their own pleadings, is trained, informed, pastoral gifted tentmakers who are a specific supporting relationship with these tentmakers. “

Gary Taylor

How might this be? What would it look like? Member Care workers getting jobs in Muslim countries not with a primary purpose of evangelism but with a primary purpose of pasturing tentmakers by sharing their experience – identifying with them by incarnational member care!

Marion Knell
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