Using the Mosque as a Mechanism for Preventing the Phenomenon of Violence

مؤسسة المسجد كآلية للوقاية من ظاهرة العنف

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Abstract:

The phenomenon of violence is one of the most widespread social problems across the globe, particularly in the present era. It is a human, social, and global phenomenon that occurs in various forms and types in both developed and developing countries. Its causes vary according to cultural contexts and societal systems. Due to its serious consequences, which now endanger the security, stability, and cohesion of societies, violence has received significant attention at all levels in an effort to find solutions to reduce it or, at the very least, mitigate its severity. As a religious institution, the mosque is one of the main mechanisms for preventing violence. This paper examines the mosque's role in preventing violence.

Keywords: Violence, Mosque, Institution, Mechanism.

Introduction:

Social issues and phenomena have long been the focus of scholars, researchers and organisations because they affect state development and societal progress in multiple ways. In this regard, civil society institutions play an important and effective role, thanks to their ability to contribute meaningfully. Contemporary studies indicate that human societies advance not only through state policies and government institutions, but also through cooperation and interaction between public bodies and civil society organisations that engage individuals in public affairs across various domains.

In this context, violence is one of the most dangerous phenomena to have spread through human societies, increasingly threatening social security, stability and cohesion. No society today, whether in a developed or a developing country, is entirely free from manifestations of violence, although its intensity varies from society to society and from historical period to historical period. The violence we witness in the contemporary world is not a new phenomenon in human history; numerous historical texts refer to violence. Nevertheless, violence today has acquired new and more serious dimensions, explaining its place as one of the foremost global concerns.

Given the wide prevalence of violence and the multiplicity and variety of its causes, inquiry into those causes is indispensable. Violence is a complex phenomenon that typically arises from the interaction of several factors and generally cannot be attributed to a single cause. Political, religious, economic, social, cultural, and psychological conditions (among others) contribute to violent behavior. In order to reduce its incidence, all these causes and factors associated with the phenomenon must be identified, analyzed, and addressed.

This can be achieved by devising effective mechanisms to confront and eradicate violence. In this regard, religion plays a significant role in regulating human conduct, surpassing the influence of purely secular institutions due to its moral and normative resources. Given religion's capacity to shape individual behavior, the role of the mosque as a religious institution can be

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leveraged to prevent violence. As one of Islam's principal institutions, the mosque plays an important and visible role in social life and has the potential to affect many areas of communal existence, especially in the present era when societies rely on such institutions to secure solidarity and cohesion. Mosques exert considerable influence on intellectual and behavioral change among community members. Based on this, the following research question can be posed:
What limits the mosque's contribution to preventing violence?

To answer this question, this study uses a descriptive approach to examine the phenomenon as it exists in reality and provide a precise description. Here, the descriptive method is used to portray the mosque as an institution and violence as a phenomenon, to define these concepts, and to present the mosque's primary functions for reducing violence. We also use the analytical method to examine the content of the mosque's various functions, particularly those related to violence prevention, in order to make recommendations that could enhance its effectiveness.

We address the research question in two parts. First, we define the study variables conceptually. Secondly, we discuss the mosque's role in preventing violence.

1. Conceptual definitions of the study variables

Adequate comprehension of a concept is essential for rigorous analysis, and defining terms clearly helps to specify the intended meaning and distinguish a concept from related terms. We therefore begin by defining the mosque, followed by violence.

1.1 Definition of the Mosque

Due to its special status and variety of roles and responsibilities, the mosque has numerous definitions. Here, we present both the linguistic and technical definitions.

1.1.1 Linguistic Definition of the Mosque

Linguistically, "masjid" (with a kasra under the jīm) is the place of prostration. With a fathah on the jīm, the root may refer to the forehead on which one prostrates. The word "masjadah" (with a kasra on the mīm and a fatḥa on the jīm) denotes a small prayer rug or mat[1]. This term is also used to refer to any place of prostration, as in the Prophet's statement, "The earth has been made for me a mosque and a means of purification,[2]" broadening the semantic field to include any site on Earth where one prostrates.

Some accounts define the mosque as the locus of prayer because it is the place of prostration—the lowest point of the standing worshipper—an act of humility and submission. This prostration expresses abasement before God and is a prescribed act that merits reward[3], as indicated by the Qur'anic imperative, "So prostrate to God and worship" (fa-sjudū lillāh wa-ʿbudū)[4]. Prostration, in a broad sense, is common to humans, animals, and plants. However, the ritual prostration specified in the sharia is a defined pillar of prayer. Etymologically, "masjid" is derived from the verb "sajada"—"to bow the head" or "to bend"—and related lexical notions include submissive gaze and humility[5].

Accordingly, the mosque is where Muslims gather in straight rows to pray; it is a space designated for ritual prayer.

1.1.2 Terminological definition of the mosque

There is little divergence between the mosque's terminological definitions and its linguistic meaning; most technical definitions adopt the same basic sense while elaborating further. The mosque is defined as a central religious institution around which the various institutions of the Islamic community—both modern and traditional—converge. Its role encompasses the dissemination of Islamic teachings and behavioural values in accordance with the Prophetic methodology. To the present day the mosque remains an important centre of Islamic consciousness and of promulgating religious values aimed at constructing and preserving the Muslim community. The mosque is considered the primary institution responsible for human development. It cultivates courage and instills benevolence, compassion, love, and brotherhood among Muslims. The mosque also discourages selfishness and feelings of inferiority that may arise from social status. In the mosque, each person experiences the dignity bestowed by God, as well as equality in rights

and duties with those standing beside them in the prayer rows. This equality is irrespective of social rank, since no one has superiority over another except by piety[6].

More simply, the mosque has been described as "the place where people pray together" or "the house in which one prostrates and worships.[7]" Any place devoted to worship may be called a mosque. Some extend the term to the parts of the human body used in prostration, such as the forehead, nose, hands, knees, and feet. This recalls the Qur'anic injunction that "the mosques belong to Allah—do not call on anyone with Allah.[8]"

Based on the foregoing, the operational definition of a mosque in this study is a designated place or building where individuals voluntarily prostrate themselves on specified parts of their bodies, arranged specifically for Muslims to perform the ritual of prayer. Mosques are also used for Quran recitation, remembrance, and spiritual retreat. As the first formal religious institution in Muslim societies, mosques attend to communal affairs through congregational prayer, Friday sermons, educational lessons, Qur'an memorization circles, preaching, counseling, pedagogical guidance, and interventions to address or mitigate social problems, such as violence. Additionally, the mosque serves as a forum for discussing matters of public concern to Muslims and for providing assistance to those in need.

1.2 Definition of Violence

Due to the increasing prevalence of violence in various forms and spheres, particularly in the present era, and the unique nature of the phenomenon, along with the growing attention to it at all levels, it is crucial to define the concept linguistically and terminologically.

1.2.1 Linguistic (Etymological) Definition of Violence

The linguistic root of the term "violence" in European languages points to the use of force to achieve an objective. The English word "violence" comes from the Latin vis, which means strength, force, or power and often has connotations of physical force or coercion[9]. The related Latin adjective violentus (from which the English word "violent" is derived) denotes ferocity and attributes such as forcefulness, roughness, desecration, violation, and transgression. These etymological senses emphasize the use of aggressive or overpowering force to compel others[10].

1.2.2 Terminological Definition of Violence

The concept of violence occupies a significant portion of contemporary social science discourse due to the variety of social factors that have contributed to its prevalence. In its simplest sense, violence is defined as "harm by hand or tongue, by deed or word, in a confrontational setting with another person.[11]"

In sociology, violence is also defined as the use of force to compel an individual or group. It is expressed through beating, imprisonment, or execution, and it can also manifest as social pressure whose legitimacy depends on societal recognition Another definition describes violence as any severe act that contradicts the nature of a thing but is imposed upon it[12].

Legally, violence refers to physical force and bodily coercion—i.e., force used without lawful justification—and anything extreme or extraordinary[13]. Muhammad Ahmad Khattab defines violence as "the unlawful or nonconforming use of pressure or force.[14]"

Despite variations in definitions, violence can be unmistakably characterized as behavior marked by force, aggression, and coercion intended to compel another party to act against their will.

2. The mosque's role in preventing violence

Instilling and mobilizing religious and moral values in individuals is one of the most effective ways to curb and prevent violent behavior. This is achieved by applying religious norms that distinguish lawful and unlawful conduct, good and evil, as well as systems of punishment and reward. Because of its authority in conveying religious teachings, the mosque occupies a unique position in clarifying these norms and preventing social ills that afflict communities.

The following analysis examines the mosque's preventive role with respect to violence by first outlining its main functions and then describing the methods it uses.

2.1 Mosque functions that contribute to violence prevention

The mosque performs a variety of functions across many spheres of life and makes a substantial contribution to preventing all forms of violence and other social ills that afflict communities. These functions include:

2.1.1 Spiritual and Psychological Function

The mosque occupies an important and sacred place in Islam and in the lives of Muslims. As a place of worship and prayer, the mosque enables worshippers to feel connected to the divine, fostering a sense of tranquility and inner reassurance. The mosque acts as a school for spiritual formation, playing an active role in the moral and psychological rehabilitation of individuals and communities by imparting elevated values and religious principles. These spiritual resources strengthen a believer's attachment to God, refine the self, reduce selfishness, and encourage benevolent behavior. The mosque also functions as a locus of cultural exchange within Muslim societies. It instills positive norms and behaviors that guide social interactions and protect the community from deviant ideas and actions—such as violence.

2.1.2 Educational and Pedagogical Function

Historically, the mosque has served as a place for communal worship and as a center for learning. It has produced scholars and jurists, serving as a fertile source of religious knowledge and high moral values. In effect, it is the first kind of public school experienced by Muslim communities, where generations received guided moral formation. As a religious and social institution, the mosque helps preserve doctrine, uphold values, and provide guidance for proper conduct[15].

The mosque's pedagogical role is an important instrument in combating violence. As an educational institution, the mosque directly influences the life, behavior, and interpersonal conduct of the individual Muslim. Therefore, the mosque is among the most suitable settings for character formation and socialization, aiming to produce morally responsible members of society[16].

2.1.3 Social function

Throughout Islamic history, the mosque has performed many services that today can only be provided by specialised agencies and multiple institutions. During the time of the Prophet, the mosque served as a shelter for the poor, providing material and moral support. It also served as a space for social interaction and networking, bringing together different segments of society and strengthening bonds of affection and brotherhood. Historically, the mosque has been a centre of social solidarity, organising charitable activities such as collecting alms and donations for the poor, and collecting and distributing zakāh. It also serves as a focal point for youth guidance and rehabilitation and as a place where people can come together to learn commitment to the community and be discouraged from atomistic individualism. The mosque directs people towards beneficial activities, adjudicates disputes and mediates conflicts.

Thus, the relationship between religion and social and personal behaviour is intimate; the mosque sanctifies behavioural norms that contribute to socialisation. It is therefore one of the most effective instruments of social organisation, permeating daily life by emphasising moral values such as what is lawful and what is prohibited[17].

Of all the social roles of the mosque, none is more important than strengthening the religious and moral conscience of individuals and the community. This conscience comprises the moral values instilled in the human soul that are translated into communal practices through social influences. One way the mosque reinforces this conscience is through religious discourse. Individuals who adopt Islamic values as the standard for thought and conduct contribute to the moral elevation of society. The mosque strengthens religious conscience by reinforcing mechanisms of social control that enable the Muslim community to preserve its foundational elements and resist various forms of deviance. Islam is a regulatory system that encompasses acts of worship, interpersonal transactions, values, and ethics. When a Muslim enters the mosque, he or she is prepared, both materially and spiritually, to receive messages and incentives that

encourage righteous conduct according to Islamic standards. This involves being conscious of one's duties and prohibitions. These injunctions constitute a form of social regulation that the mosque helps instantiate[18].

Accordingly, while worshippers are present, those responsible for the mosque focus on strengthening the religious conscience across four domains that constitute vital arenas of social regulation: acts of worship (ibādāt), interpersonal transactions (muʿāmalāt), moral conduct (akhlaq) and sanctions (punishments). These four areas function as active forms of social control, and reinforcing them is tantamount to reinforcing religious restraint.

When observed faithfully, acts of worship operate as positive social controls that strengthen the individual's religious motivation; they also interrelate with interpersonal transactions to produce virtuous ethics. Offenders and those who fall short are met with sanctions. A weakened religious conscience undoubtedly contributes to violent behaviour: diminished religious commitment can destabilise a person's values, reduce remembrance of God and weaken adherence to moral obligations. Numerous specialised studies on violence have shown that a strong religious conscience is one of the most powerful restraints on proper conduct, whereas its erosion can lead to violent behaviour. A weak faith and neglect of devotional duties can undermine an individual's relationship with God[19], thereby creating space for deviant and often violent actions. Therefore, a deficient religious conscience facilitates a path towards moral corruption, whereas a robust religious conscience has the opposite effect.

2.1.4 Political Function

The mosque's political role has evolved since the time of the Prophet. Historically, it served as a political and administrative center where conferences were held to discuss communal affairs, consultative decisions were made, delegations were received, oaths of allegiance were administered, general public policy was formulated, and military campaigns were coordinated and launched. Today, specialized political institutions perform most of these functions, so the mosque's overt political role has diminished.

Nevertheless, the mosque retains an indirect political function by cultivating conscientious citizens: individuals who love their country; understand and fulfill their duties for the sake of God; and are aware of and claim their rights by legitimate means. By contributing to social reforms that promote security and justice and by protecting individual and collective rights and freedoms[20], the mosque helps curb manifestations of violence, or at least mitigate them.

2.2 Methods used by the mosque to prevent violence

The mosque plays a key role in preventing violence through various means, particularly the Friday sermon (khutba), lessons, dhikr circles, lectures and religious occasions. The following sections discuss these instruments.

2.2.1 The khutba(Friday sermon)

A khutbah is an address intended to clarify and persuade; it comprises the rhetorical techniques used by a speaker to convince listeners of the truth of a claim or the correctness of an action or omission[21]. Specifically, the Friday khutbah denotes what the imam delivers from the pulpit on Fridays. This is a liturgical and obligatory act, indicated by the Quranic injunction: "O you who believe, when the call to prayer is made on Fridays, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave off trade; that is better for you if only you knew"[22] (Qur'an).

The khutba is one of the most influential forms of discourse affecting Muslim behavior. It occupies a special status in Islamic law and practice, so it demands careful attention. Sermon topics should address people's needs, and preachers should be chosen for their competence and rhetorical skill. Although the khutbah is a religious discourse, it routinely addresses worldly concerns. It must account for contemporary developments and issues that affect people's lives. It should diagnose communal realities and persuade listeners through wisdom, admonition, rational argumentation, and evidence, while also appealing to their emotions[23].

Mosque sermons are instrumental in community education because mosques function as media institutions grounded in religious principles that underpin faith and disseminate Islamic culture. Sermons address the intellectual, doctrinal, and systemic challenges that Islam faces. Therefore, imams and preachers have a duty to inform congregants about societal weaknesses, corruption, violence, and deviance, deploy religious values to counteract these problems, and offer counsel and moral guidance[24].

Given the khutbah's powerful effect on behavior and the high esteem in which it is held, priority should be given to ensuring that imams are capable and that sermon topics are relevant to people's realities and needs. This requires improving the quality and effectiveness of religious discourse. When imams and preachers fulfill this role effectively, the khutbah can serve as a preventive tool, protecting society from the risks of violence.

2.2.2 Religious classes and dhikr circles

Historically, the mosque has played a significant role in religious education and moral formation. Graduates of mosque-based study circles often combine knowledge with piety and understanding with practice, setting an exemplary standard for scholarly ethics. Given their spiritual character and the fact that they bring Muslims together regardless of social background, ethnicity, or educational level without discrimination, study circles (halaqāt) in mosques play a significant role in Qurʾān memorisation and the dissemination of religious knowledge[25].

These classes and dhikr gatherings promote the moral development of individuals and consequently contribute to the well-being of society, thereby helping to reduce violence. The value of these sessions depends on the topics chosen and how they are presented: issues are examined in detail and discussed from multiple perspectives, enabling individuals to develop an understanding of concepts, issues, and phenomena, as well as their causes and consequences.

These lessons, especially those addressing social and ethical subjects, should therefore be utilised to educate and guide the community in confronting challenges to its security and stability. There is no doubt that violence, in its verbal, physical and psychological forms, constitutes one of the most serious threats to societal security and cohesion.

2.2.3 Lectures:

Lectures are scholarly activities held in the mosque. They are delivered by the imam or invited scholars and preachers[26]. Addressing particular topics within a limited time frame, lectures are not necessarily tied to a specific textbook or continuous syllabus. Often pitched at a middle level between advanced instruction for students of knowledge and material suitable for the general public, lectures attract large audiences because of the spiritual merit of staying in the mosque and the atmosphere of congregational prayer that precedes and follows such events.

Lectures organized in mosques usually attract large audiences because of the spiritual merit of staying in the mosque and the atmosphere of congregational prayer that precedes and follows such events[27].

As an institution with advanced social and epistemic functions, the mosque can use lectures to prevent violence. Through the analysis, discussion, and exposition of the risks and negative effects of violence on individuals and society, lectures can prepare people to accept others and foster tolerance and dialogue.

2.2.4 Utilizing Religious Occasions

Religious festivals and other commemorative occasions can reinforce a culture of tolerance and brotherhood and discourage behaviors leading to disorder, deviance, and violence. These events provide opportunities for communal reaffirmation of shared values, public moral education, charitable action, and outreach. These activities can strengthen social bonds and reduce tensions that might otherwise escalate into violent conflict.

Conclusion:

The mosque is the most effective institution for moral reform through faith-based education and the inculcation of Islamic values in the human soul. As the principal institution for

socialisation, it surpasses other social bodies in its capacity to shape character. Beyond being an important agent of social change and development, the mosque raises communal cultural awareness across multiple domains, sustains that awareness, and guides individuals toward righteousness while steering them away from corruption, deviance, and violence.

Based on our study of the mosque as a mechanism for preventing violence, we have the following findings and recommendations.

Findings:

- Violence is, by its nature, aggressive behavior directed against human beings. It is a real phenomenon that cannot be ignored, and it exists in various forms. The international community seeks mechanisms and remedies to eliminate or reduce its spread.

The mosque contributes to preserving and entrenching authentic Islamic values, educating and morally forming Muslim individuals, especially youth, and guiding social conduct. The mosque deepens spiritual values, promotes social cohesion and integration, and fosters cooperation and solidarity. These effects strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and affection among community members and reduce social disparities. This produces a more cohesive, unified society that is less susceptible to violence, corruption, and deviance.

Mosque-based religious discourse functions as a regulatory force that protects the moral and social order from deviation and violence. Due to the mosque's sanctity and reach across social strata, its rhetoric is among the most powerful and influential in shaping individual conduct. Consequently, mosque sermons play an important role in raising public awareness and preventing various forms of violence.

The mosque plays a significant and effective role in promoting intellectual and behavioral change among community members. It influences them positively and offers religious and social guidance through sermons, classes, dhikr circles, lectures, and religious festivals and occasions. When those responsible for the mosque strategically and thoughtfully mobilize this role, communities can avoid many manifestations of conflict, violence, and deviance.

Recommendations:

Revive the mosque's original role from the time of the Prophet and the rightly guided caliphate, rather than restricting it exclusively to worship.

Raise public awareness about the seriousness of violence and its negative consequences for individuals and society. Activate the mosque's role in this regard by influencing people through sermons, lessons, lectures, and similar activities.

Equip the mosque with the necessary mechanisms and instruments to protect the community from social issues such as violence. Grant the mosque broader authority to keep pace with contemporary developments and engage with emerging issues to educate and guide the public.

Attend to the imam's academic and financial needs, as deficiencies in either may hinder his ability to fulfill his duties. Concurrently, work to improve the quality of religious discourse and enhance its effectiveness.

Establish partnerships and cooperation between the mosque and other social institutions to ensure complementarity and form morally upright individuals who contribute to building a wholesome society free from disorder, deviance, and violence.

The mosque's imam should play a prominent role in the social integration process through sound socialization practices, promoting a culture of dialogue and tolerance among community members, and rejecting sectarianism and violence. The imam should guide and counsel people to preserve the nation's unity, strengthen its social fabric, and foster its development.

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