

Islamic cleric advises worshippers to rape and beat wives

An Australian cleric has provoked outrage by telling worshippers it is acceptable for men to rape and beat their wives.

By Bonnie Malkin in Sydney

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Self-styled cleric Samir Abu Hamza, who runs the Islamic Information and Services Network of Australasia in Melbourne, advised a male audience in Sydney in 2003 that they could force their wives to have sex and beat them if they were "disobedient".

In a lecture titled "The Keys to a Successful Marriage", which has since been posted on the internet and viewed thousands of times, Mr Hamza said men could beat their wives, "to shape them up", but should try not to draw blood or bruise them.

He also said women "must respond" if their husbands wanted to have sex, and ridiculed laws that prohibit rape within marriage.

"In this country if the husband wants to sleep with his wife and she does not want to and she hasn't got a sickness or whatever, there is nothing wrong with her she just does not feel like it, and he ends up sleeping with her by force ... it is known to be as rape," Mr Hamza said.

"Amazing, how can a person rape his wife?" His comments have been condemned by Islamic women's groups and Kevin Rudd, the prime minister, has called for an immediate public apology.

"Under no circumstances is sexual violence permissible or acceptable in Australia," he said.

However, Mr Hamza, whose organisation offers spiritual advice, prayer facilities and boxing, karate and gym classes for Muslims, has refused to retract his statements.

In the sermon Mr Hamza initially tells his listeners "don't hit your wife".

But he goes on to detail how men should hit their wives, according to his interpretation of Islamic teachings.

He says it is permissible to hit women as a "last resort" but that "the beating the Mohammed showed is like the toothbrush that you use to brush your teeth".

"You are not allowed to bruise them, you are not allowed to make them bleed.

"You don't go and grab a broomstick and say that is what Allah has said."

Ramzi Elsayed, Islamic Council of Victoria state president, said Islam did not condone violence against women or making a wife have sex with her husband against her will.

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