



## Martyrdom in Early Islam: The Role of Martyrs' Mothers

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### ABSTRACT

\*Published Online: 05 July 2022

This paper looks at examples of martyrs' mothers in the seventh century. The purpose is to explore the behavior and the role of these mothers in the early history of Islam during the seventh century. More specifically, the paper examines the relationship between females' religious beliefs and their roles within the family and society in the context of early Islamic society. Although the stories of mothers of Muslim martyrs are available in few English resources, there is little analysis of their roles. To this end, this paper focuses on four maternal figures in the Islamic tradition: Sumayyah bint Khabbat, Nusaybah bint Ka'ab, Asmaa bint Abu Bakr, and Al-Khansaa. The analysis shows that there is no contradiction between being a mother and promoting the death of a child for the cause of God.

### Keywords:

Martyrdom, Islam,  
sacrifice, struggle,  
mourning, maternal  
figures, endurance

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of martyrdom initially appeared at the beginning of the second century was described as "an attempt to rescue some type of meaning and dignity from death" (Cook 2007, p. 11). For Cooks (2005), martyrdom is a significant religious term that is proven to be a very prominent expression of faith. The word "martyr" comes from the Greek word *μάρτυς* meaning "witness".

Even though martyrdom does not necessarily lead to the growth of a religion, it is believed to be "a statement intended not only to reinforce the faithful, but also to undermine persecutors and even to convert nonbelievers" (Shepardson 2007, p.16). In this regard, martyrs mainly struggle in the cause of God and sacrifice their souls for the sake of truth in times of social conflicts. When

Christian martyrs, for instance, faced great dangers in early ages to renounce their faith, they gladly chose to be put to death instead. For them, martyrdom was their weapon to fight their persecutors, and Satan as well (Middleton 2006, p.74).

Martyrdom, nevertheless, is distinguished from suicide that expresses an individual's desire to seek death and is considered a sin in Abrahamic theology.

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\*Cite this Article: Asmaa Shehata (2022). *Martyrdom in Early Islam: The Role of Martyrs' Mothers. International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies*, 2(7), 228-234

A Muslim believer, for example, who commits suicide is consigned to hell that is confirmed by the Quran in which Muslims are advised not to "kill yourselves: for verily Allah hath been to you most merciful" and are also warned that "whoever does this aggressively and unjustly, we will soon cast him into fire; and this is easy to Allah" (The Qur'an 4:29-30). Likewise, suicide for Christians is a sin, and they firmly believe that they "must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine" (Chesterton 2004, p. 82).

The stories of martyrs are constantly narrated within communities and eventually become a central component in nationalistic tales where martyrs themselves are shown as powerful images of the nation and public objectives. On the one hand, according to Middleton, "it is the telling of stories that gives martyrdom its power" (2006, p.14), but on the other hand, their tales are comprehended as involving in "truth-producing" actions via their self-sacrifices (Dunn 2010). In this vein, Gedik sees mothers of martyrs to be "mothers of the nation" who "raised loyal citizens for it" (2013, p. 24). Therefore, this paper focuses on discussing the behavior and the role of mothers of martyrs in early Islam. The purpose is to explore mothers' attitudes towards the martyrdom their children, which subsequently reveals the meaning of martyrdom in early Islam. To this end, four case studies from the early Islamic era are provided: Sumayyah bint Khabbat, Nusaybah bint Ka'ab, Asmaa bint Abu Bakr, and Al-Khansa. The characteristics of these female figures and their actions are displayed in relation to both the issue of

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martyrdom and the mother-child relationship in an attempt to shed some light on their essential roles.

### METHODOLOGY

In this paper, I use the content analysis approach to examine the Islamic perspective on martyrdom as it pertains to the Qur'an. As a popular form of textual analysis, content analysis enables researchers to easily summarize a large amount of data, recognize patterns within a specific text, and, more importantly, "move beyond manifest content found in texts to latent content or interpretations" (Nelson and Woods 2014, p. 116). The content analysis approach is widely utilized in religious studies because it clearly elucidates the target text's embedded message. It is a valuable method that helps researchers provide clear interpretations of target texts and clarify the underlying arguments and presuppositions. In addition to the two primary sources that are used-i.e., the Qur'an and *Hadith*<sup>1</sup> (the Prophetic Tradition)- several scholarly studies are used as well.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The image of mothers who overtly express their support for the martyrdom of their children with determination and joy may sound incomprehensible. Yet their stories remain memorable and are generally seen as means of inspiring religion loyalty. In the early days of Islam, Muslims felt the responsibility to defend their faith. In this respect, Muslim mothers offered to sacrifice both their souls and their children for the sake of their belief. They were extremely happy to send their children to heaven where they would enjoy everlasting bliss (Lewinstein 2001). I begin with an introduction to the concept of martyrdom in Islam, followed by a discussion of the nature of the mother-child bond, and then four case studies of female figures.

#### *The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam*

Martyrdom is a central theme in the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions that is prominently displayed in the following Qur'anic verse:

Verily, Allah has purchased of the believers their lives and their properties; for the price that theirs shall be the Paradise. They fight in Allah's cause, so they kill (others) and are killed. It is a promise in truth which is binding on Him in the Torah, and the Gospel and the Qur'an. And who is truer to his covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which you have concluded. That is the supreme success (The Qur'an 9: 111).

The specific Islamic term for the concept of martyrdom is *shahada*, which is an Arabic word meaning "to see" or "to witness", and the word *shahid*<sup>2</sup> means a person who bears witness to a case and/or a martyr. Although the Qur'an always refers to martyrs as those who die in the path of/ for the sake of God, the word *shahid* is never mentioned in the Qur'an to refer to the witness of faith. Alternatively, the word *shahid* is used in several Qur'anic verses to refer to a legal "eyewitness" to a certain event. For example, one of the verses states that the best witness testifying against one's deeds on the Day of Resurrection shall be the person himself "Nay! Man will be a witness against himself" where his body parts such as skin, hands and legs will speak about his deeds (The Qur'an 75: 14).

Nevertheless, all what we know about martyrdom in Islam comes from *Hadith* where Prophet Muhammad clearly distinguished between two main categories of Martyrs. The first category includes those who die in the battlefield fighting for the cause of God. The second category, however, includes victims of epidemics, of drowning, of pleurisy, from diarrhoea, by fire, by being struck by a house or a wall falling into ruins and from death due to childbirth (Muhammad 1965, p. 810). Unlike battlefield martyrs who are buried in their bloody clothes without washing, Said the Prophet, the second group of martyrs have to be bathed before burial. Despite the slight differences between the two categories, martyrs in the two groups are expected to have the same heavenly awards for martyrs in the afterlife that are displayed in the Qur'an in various verses such as the following:

Think not of those who have been killed in the way of Allah as dead; they are rather living with their Lord, well-provided for. Rejoicing in what their Lord has given them of His bounty, knowing that they have nothing to fear and that they shall not grieve (The Qur'an 3: 169).

Let those fight in the path of God who sell the life of this world for the other. Whoever fights in the path of God, whether he be slain or victorious, we shall give him a vast reward (The Qur'an 4:74).

God has purchased the souls and property of the believers in exchange for Paradise. They fight for the cause of God to destroy His enemies and to sacrifice themselves. This is a true promise which He has revealed in the

<sup>1</sup> *Hadith* is an Arabic word that refers to Prophet Muhammad's sayings and actions. There are a number of Hadith collections. This study only uses one collection, Sahih al-Bukhari (812 C.E.).

<sup>2</sup> It is the singular form of the plural *shuhada* meaning witness and martyr.

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Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. No one is more faithful to His promise than God. Let this bargain be glad news for them. This is indeed the supreme triumph (The Qur'an 9:111).

The above verses and others are commonly seen as a source of comfort for those on the battlefield and their families as well. The Qur'an also assures that Muslims should defend oppressed people who seek their help in another verse that states, "why do you not fight for the cause of God or save the helpless men, women, and children who cry out, "Lord, set us free from this town of wrong doers and send us a guardian and a helper?" (The Qur'an 4:75). By and large, seeking martyrdom is essential in Islam and therefore Muslims are encouraged to sacrifice their lives in defense of the Islamic faith and helpless people.

Despite the significance of martyrdom in Islam, the Qur'an presents a very few examples of notable martyr. For example, a believer from the family of the Egyptian Pharaoh who hid his faith and defended Moses by saying, "would you kill a man just because he says God is my Lord? He has brought you illustrious miracles from your Lord. If he speaks lies, it will only harm him, but if he speaks the Truth, some of his warnings may affect you. God does not guide a transgressing liar." (The Qur'an 40:28). His award is also reported in another Qur'anic verse that states "So, Allah protected him from the evils they plotted, and the people of Pharaoh were enveloped by the worst of punishment." (The Qur'an 40:45). These verses remind Muslims that those who die in the cause of God are not truly dead, but rather proceed directly to heaven.

### *The Mother-Child Bond*

The relationship between motherhood and martyrdom is a significant one. Mothers are commonly expected to sacrifice their lives on the behalf of their children whom they intend to protect from any threats or hazards. They are also believed to have a stronger emotional relationship with their children, than fathers, which is claimed to be "the strongest of human emotions" (Evans 1999, p.86). Conversely, the mothers of martyrs represent a different perspective on motherhood that displays mothers' significant role in the martyrdom of their sons.

In this regard, we can see different examples of well-known mothers throughout the history of Islam who encouraged their sons to stand by their faith and sacrifice their lives in the cause of God. In other words, they supported their children's mission as protectors of the Islamic faith with fortitude and contentment. By doing so, Mothers enacted their religious duties over their maternal sentiments because they firmly believed in God's promise that martyrs are not to be mourned for but rather to be rewarded. The classical example was Hajar, Prophet Abraham's second wife, who, according to the

Islamic faith, obediently accepted God's command to Abraham to sacrifice their son, Ishmael. When the devil attempted to convince Hajar, as stated in the Islamic literature, to stop Abraham, she responded by saying that he should obey God's command and slay Ishmael. Although Ishmael was her only son, Hajar did not oppose having him slaughtered and Ishmael was later replaced with a huge ram due to the family's genuine sincerity and absolute obedience (AL- Shibli 1992).

The same submission to God's will was also seen by Jesus's mother, Mary, who was present at the crucifixion of her son and showed full obedience and patience despite her severe agony for losing him (Ayoub 1987).

In Biblical and post-Biblical Judaism, the case of Hannah and her seven sons, that is known as the Maccabean mother, is another example of a mother of martyr's obedience and truthfulness. According to the story, king Antiochus forced the Jews including Hanna and her sons to abandon their ancestral customs and eat pork. The mother, subsequently, convinced her sons to persistently stand for their ancestral customs and said, "I was a chaste maiden and did not leave my father's house; but I kept guard over the rib built into woman's body. No seducer of the desert nor deceiver in the field corrupted me, nor did the seducing and beguiling serpent defile my maidenly purity.

Through all the days of my prime I stayed with my husband" (Knohl 2008, p. 40). That is, the mother declared her faithfulness to her father and her purity as a woman which asserted, in her opinion, her right to be obeyed by her children. Her words were so strong and enormously influenced her seven sons. Therefore, when her sons were asked to choose either to follow the king's command and eat pork or to lose their lives, they persistently refused to eat and chose to die. As a result, the king's guards tortured six of them to death. When the youngest son, however, was a little bit hesitant, his mother encouraged him by saying:

My son, have pity upon me, who carried you nine months in the womb and nursed you for three years and brought you to your present age. Do not be afraid of this butcher and show yourself worthy of your brothers so that by God's mercy I may get you back again with your brothers (Berenbaum and Firestone 2004, p. 125).

Up hearing his mother's words, the youngest son affirmed his commitment to the laws of his fathers and consequently, he was tortured and killed for his disobeying the King's command. Lastly, the mother was killed at the hands of the same persecutors as well. The narrative shows a unique relationship between a mother and her seven children whose story provides an excellent example of piety and bravery.

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### Case Studies

Islamic literature is full of numerous examples of martyrs whose mothers' support and encouragement are well-acknowledged. Interestingly, the first martyr in Islam was a woman, Summayya bint Khayyat, who was also a mother of a martyr, Ammar ibn Yassir. The following lines display her story with three other prominent Muslim mothers of martyrs who urged their beloved sons to seek martyrdom for God's sake during the early Islamic era in the seventh century.

#### *Sumayyah bint Khayyat (550- 615 CE)*

Sumayyah bint Khayyat was a maidservant of Abu Hydhayfa ibn Al-Mughira, who was one of the wealthy men of the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century. Sumayyah got married to an immigrant to Mecca, Yassir, and had two sons: Ammar and Ubaidallah. The family was a lowclass one that was among the first to embrace Islam. As a result, they were severely tortured and tormented by Banu Makhzum tribe in the Arabia Peninsula who turned their lives into hell by forcing them to lie down on hot rocks under the blazing sun in order to abandon Islam. Whenever Prophet Muhammad passed by them, he consoled them by saying "Keep patient, Yassir's family. Verily, your meeting place will be in paradise" (Khaalid and Eliwa 2003, p. 621). Hearing his words, Sumayyah felt strong and encouraged her family members to endure the pain and be ready to die in the cause of God.

The torture continued and resulted in the death of her husband and her youngest son, Ubaidah, who were killed before her eyes. Despite the physical and emotional pains, Sumayyah remained resilient and brave. Her persistence and strength provoked her persecutor, Abu Jahl, who stabbed her with his spear, and she became the first woman martyr in the history of Islam.

Although her eldest son, Ammar, survived that torture, he followed in his mother's footsteps and was willing to suffer and die for the sake of God. Ammar felt his commitment to defend his faith and, therefore, participated in a number of battles afterward where he was martyred in the battle of Siffeen in 657 CE. To Ammar, his mother was a role model and her words of encouragement to bravely endure torture and death constantly rang in his ears and subsequently led him to the same end (Khaalid and Eliwa 2003, p. 623).

#### *Nusaybah Bint Ka'ab (568-635 CE)*

Nusaybah Bint Ka'ab was from the Banu Najjar tribe who lived in *Al-Madinah*<sup>3</sup> and embraced

Islam at an early age before the Prophet's immigration to their city in 622 CE. When Nusaybah accepted Islam voluntarily, she played a significant role by teaching the Islamic tradition to women in her city. She was the first female soldier to participate in a number of battles under the leadership of the Prophet such as Uhud, Hunain and Yamamah in which she showed great courage. During the battle of Uhud<sup>4</sup>, for example, she and her two sons were soldiers in the Muslim army, and she was severely injured while she was defending Prophet Muhammad who said to her "in whichever direction I turned in the battlefield I could see you defending and protecting me" (Ghadanfār 2003, p. 206). Nusaybah was seriously wounded in that battle and needed a year to recover.

After the death of Prophet Muhammad, Nusaybah and her youngest son, Habib ibn Zaid, took part in many battles with Muslims against apostates who claimed prophethood. In one of those battles, Habib was detained by Musaylimah<sup>5</sup> who attempted to force him to testify that he was a messenger of God like Prophet Muhammad. When Habib refused to follow his command, Musaylimah tortured him and cut off his body into pieces. Upon hearing the news, Nusaybah showed great patience and continued to participate in other battles to defend Islam together with her elder son, Abdullah. In the battle of Yamamah, she courageously fought and lost her right arm as well as her son. Nusaybah gave an example of bravery and sacrifice who was always proud that both her sons died in the path of God (Khaalid and Eliwa 2003). Her sincere belief did not contradict with her maternal instinct and did not prevent her from encouraging her sons' martyrdom. on the contrary, it supported her to encourage them to sacrifice their lives to defend their faith.

#### *Asmaa Bint Abu Bakr (595-692 CE)*

She was the elder sister of the Prophet's wife, Aisha, and the daughter of the first Muslim Caliph, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, who ruled the first Muslim state after the Prophet's death. She was married to Al Zubayr ibn Al-Awwam and had five sons, Abdullah, Al-Munzir, Asim, Al-Muhajir and Urwa, and three daughters, Khadija, Umm al-Hassan and Aisha. Her role in the Prophet's *Hijra*<sup>6</sup> from Mecca to *Al Madinah* in 622 CE was significant as she carried food and water to the Prophet and her father during their stay in the cave of Thawr. As reported in Al-Bukhari, Asmaa was a faithful believer who had set herself for God for performance of the most sublime acts by facing all that happened to her and took every step needed for it. For instance, she sought the Prophet's

<sup>3</sup> Al-Madinah is a city in the western part of Saudi Arabia which is the second holiest city in Islam after Mecca. It was the capital of the first Islamic state during the time of the Prophet and his first four successors

<sup>4</sup> It is a battle that took place in 625 CE between the early Muslims and their Quraish Meccan enemies.

<sup>5</sup> Musaylimah ibn Ḥabīb was known as Musaylimah al Kazzab "the great liar" and was one of many people who claimed prophethood in the seventh century in the Arabia Peninsula.

<sup>6</sup> Hijra is an Arabic word meaning immigration.



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advice regarding how to deal with her mother who was not a Muslim yet by saying:

My mother came to me while she was an atheist during the lifetime of the Prophet whom I asked about her. I said, 'My mother came willingly to me. Would I keep good ties with her?' Prophet Muhammad replied, 'Yes, keep good ties with your mother (Al-Asqalani 1938).

The above statement showed her submission and commitment to her faith. Asmaa also participated in various battles in which her bravery was clearly demonstrated. In the battle of Yarmouk, for instance, Asmaa and other women, according to Al Waqidi<sup>7</sup>, fought stronger than the men. Similarly, her strength was shown in her advice to her son, Abdullah, when he came to consult her regarding Al-Hajjaj's message<sup>8</sup> to him. The following conversation reveals her strength, faithfulness and religious commitment:

Abdullah: O mother, the people abandoned me; only a few of them who still support me.

However, they could no longer fight than an hour on my part.

Asmaa: You know yourself best. If you realized that you are right and calling for the truth, you would better go on. It is the issue for which your fellows passed away. Do not surrender your neck to Banu Umayyah to play it. But if you just wanted a worldly benefit, you would be the worst man who demolished himself and his fellows.

Abdullah: By Allah, this is also my opinion, mother. But I fear to suffer crucifixion after death.

Asmaa: Skinning a slaughtered goat does not bring it pain. Off you go and seek Allah's help (Al Waqidi 2000, p. 325).

Here, Asmaa motivated her son to remain steadfast on his belief and willingly accept death which was against her maternal instinct but was consistent with her devotion to her faith. Her encouragement for her son's martyrdom was also shown in her advice to her son to take off the

7 Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Omar Al Waqidi was a historian of Islam who wrote "The Islamic Conquest of Syria", Translated by Mawlana Sulayman al-Kindi Pages 325.

8 During the Umayyad reign, the caliph of Damascus, Abd al-Malik, sent his army to Al-madina to end Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr's rule there. On approaching Mecca, Al-Hajjaj, the leader of the army, sent a message to Abdullah in which he gave him three choices: to surrender and be taken to the caliph of Damascus, to peacefully leave Al-madina alone or to continue fighting till death. protective shield vest that he was wearing and added "this is not the behavior of whoever wants what you want" (Khaalid and Eilwa 2003, p. 614). Thus, Abdullah obediently followed his mother's advice. He took off his shield vest and joined the army with which he fought fearlessly and was martyred. After his death, Al-Hajjaj ordered to have his body crucified and he went to talk to his mother (Asmaa) saying:

Al-Hajjaj: O mother, the leader of the believers commended me to treat you well. Do you want anything?

Asmaa: I am not your mother. I am only the mother of this crucified man. I heard Prophet Muhammad saying, 'there will be in Thaqeef<sup>9</sup> a lair and destroyer. We knew the lair and there still you the destroyer.

Al-Hajjaj: How did I punish you your son, Asmaa?

Asmaa: You spoiled his life, but he spoiled your next (Khalid and Eilwa 2002, p. 618).

Her words indicate her complete acceptance of her son's martyrdom, which made her suffer as a mother as well. Her words also express her pride in his martyrdom which will lead him to the promised heavenly rewards. In addition, she wanted her son's behavior to provide a good model for Muslims to follow.

### *Al-Khansaa (575 – 645 CE)*

Al-Khansaa was a nickname given to Tamadur Bint Amr Ibn Shareed because of her "bent nose bone and narrow nostrils" (Khaalid and Eliwa 2003, p.646). She was a well-known poetess in the Arabian Peninsula in the pre-Islamic era. She wrote wonderful poems that she delivered in many public

al-Zubayr's rule there. On approaching Mecca, Al-Hajjaj, the leader of the army, sent a message to Abdullah in which he gave him three choices: to surrender and be taken to the caliph of Damascus, to peacefully leave Al-madina alone or to continue fighting till death.

<sup>9</sup> Thaqeef is a place in the western region in the Arabia peninsula.

<sup>7</sup> Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Omar Al Waqidi was a historian of Islam who wrote "The Islamic Conquest of Syria", Translated by Mawlana Sulayman al-Kindi Pages 325.

<sup>8</sup> During the Umayyad reign, the caliph of Damascus, Abd al-Malik, sent his army to Al-madina to end Abdullah ibn

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tribal poetry competitions and won many awards. One of her well-known poems was her elegy in which Al-Khansaa lamented her two brothers, Sakhr and Mu'aawiyah who were killed in one of the tribal fights, and addressed death saying:

What have we done to you, death?  
that you treat us so, with always another catch one  
day a warrior the next a head of state charmed by  
the loyal you choose the best.  
Iniquitous, unequating death I would not complain  
if you were just but you take the worthy leaving  
fools for us Fifty years among us upholding rights  
annulling wrongs, impatient death  
could you not wait a little longer? He still would  
be here and mine, a brother without a flaw. Peace  
be upon him and Spring rains water his tomb but  
could you not wait a little longer a little longer,  
you came too soon (Khaalid and Eliwa 2003, p.  
645)

In the above-mentioned lines, Al-Khansaa expressed her sorrow and grieve for losing her two beloved brothers. She blamed death that she described as being unfair and impatient for ending their lives at a young age without valid reasons. Death has also been portrayed as irrational because it made wrong decisions by ending the lives of those who deserved to live and turned away from those who deserved to die. After embracing Islam, Al-Khansaa's views and attitudes changed, and we find her feelings towards death and other issues became totally different. For example, Al-Khansaa's speech to her four sons, Yazid, Mu'awiyah, 'Amr, and 'Amrah, as they were preparing to leave to the battle of Al-Qadisiyah displays a different tone:

Oh, my sons. You are the offspring of the  
same man. I have never betrayed your father,  
nor cast any reflection upon your dignity of  
honor. You know the reward which God has  
for Muslims who fight the infidel. Let it be  
known to you that the world to come is better  
than this world. If you will be still alive by  
tomorrow morning, go and fight your enemy,  
and when the fighting starts, go to it and do  
your duty, as by that you will have your  
reward in paradise (Mogannam 1937, p. 22).

Here, Al-Khansaa did not address them by their names, but she used the word "sons" instead that presented her motherly sentiments. Like the Maccabean mother, she emphasized her sexual purity by not betraying their father which seems as if it was a condition had to be fulfilled so that the mother would be instantly obeyed by her children. Having known the rewards that awaited martyrs, she hoped that her sons would be martyred on that day and be sent to heaven. Her words express her pride and support for her four sons'

contribution to defend their faith. In response to her words, her sons were enthusiastic to participate in the battle of Al-Qadisiyah in which they gallantly fought and were bravely martyred. Upon hearing their martyrdom, Al-Khansaa tearlessly said, "praise be to Allah the Almighty who honored me with their being killed in His cause, and I hope that He will join me with them in the resting place of His mercy" (Femea and Bezirgan 1977, p. 4). Unlike her earlier elegy to her brothers during the pre-Islamic era, her lament to her sons showed her full acceptance of their fate by saying:

My sons, I bore you with pain and brought you  
up with care; You have fallen today for the  
cause of Islam. Who says you are dead; You  
are very much alive, and alive with honor. I  
feel proud to be the mother of martyrs  
(Mogannam 1937: 23).

Despite the mother's impulse to love and protect her children that is a natural aspect of motherhood, Al-Khansaa expressed her submission to God's will. Her satisfaction of her sons' noble death was, in her opinion, a strong testimony of their absolute loyalty and devotion to their religion. Furthermore, she overcame her natural grave and agony of the loss of her four sons whose implacable sacrifices Al-Khansaa considered an honor and a terrible hardship that tested the strength of her faith.

Taken together, there are common similarities between the stories of the four Muslim mothers where their actions were unique. Each mother showed her strength to overcome her feminine feelings and maternal instinct. Except for Sumayyah bint Khayyat who died before her son's martyrdom, mothers shared similar endurance and devotion to their faith when they heard about the death of their sons. Unlike the popularly known roles of a mother, moreover, the four mothers encouraged their beloved sons to be martyred. In my opinion, the four mothers are living martyrs and have been an excellent example of how to defend one's faith through suffering and sacrifice. I believe that the four women were not only the mothers of martyrs, but they were certainly the real sufferers as well.

### CONCLUSION

This paper explores how the role of the mother appears to be related to self-sacrifice in the early Islamic era. The accounts of the mothers of the martyrs show that women, like men, had a great role in protecting their religion which they fearlessly defended regardless of the pain and gloom they suffered from the death of their beloved sons. Not only did they promote their sons to sacrifice their lives, but they also celebrated their martyrdom rather than mourning their death. Through these and other examples, I argue, motherhood does not seem to be a barrier to martyrdom and sacrifice for the sake of God. The actions of the four Muslim mothers also reflected the positive role of women in their society and their active participation

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in public life during the seventh century, which was not limited to family issues.

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