

Blanketed By Blame, Empowered By Support: Fatima's Story

- You will need:**
- ☑ Eleven blankets (or shawls) – the blankets produce a more dramatic effect
 - ☑ Eleven individuals, mostly women, some men
 - ☑ Fatima
 - ☑ Narrator

- The scene:**
1. Fatima, representing a battered woman, sits in a chair in front of and facing the audience.
 2. Eleven characters stand in a circle, each holding a blanket, facing outward with their backs to Fatima.
 3. The Narrator stands outside the circle, to the side and reads the script of Fatima's story. *The entire script is read by the Narrator only.*
 4. The Narrator pauses after each statement from Fatima's story.
 5. After each statement, one character steps forward and places a blanket over Fatima.
 6. Then the reversal begins. After each statement, each character removes a blanket from Fatima and then faces into the circle towards Fatima.
 7. The exercise is followed by audience discussion.

The purpose of this exercise is to help participants see the structures that can cause harm and how they can be different – contributing to making change in their work.

Cast of Characters

Fatima (seated in the middle)

Narrator (stands to the side, outside the semi-circle)

(The entire script is read by the Narrator only.)

Fatima is thirty-five years old Syrian refugee who has been in the United States for a year. She has been married for 16 years with two children ages seven and fifteen. Fatima has suffered PTSD due to the war and lost a child in the events of the war. Her husband Ali has been raping her, beating her for years. *(Pause)*

Fatima has taken many steps, surrounded by her friends, family and community.

Blanketing

1. Friend

Fatima has finally told her closest friend, Sara about the abuse.

“Are you telling me that wonderful husband of yours loses his temper, hits you even? That you are powerless? Ah, I can’t believe that! Besides you’re a control freak yourself”

(Pause, wait for one person to step forward and cover Maya with a blanket. This is repeated each time after the narrator reads the part of a character.)

2. Her mother

Fatima calls her mother, even though it’s so expensive to call home.

“Try harder Fatima You were always the most stubborn one of all your sisters, their marriages are all fine, they listen to their husbands.”

3. Neighbor

The neighbors have heard her screams and sobs, the police sirens.

“The walls are pretty thin, Fatima People in the building are talking. These late shifts at work – it must be so frustrating for your husband. “Your nagging must be causing all of this.

4. His mother

Fatima mother-in-law lives close-by.

“Don’t whine Fatima, you are the one abusing my son. Do you know how many times a day I have to text him and make sure he’s ok? Besides who’ll believe you now – remember those lies you told about my husband? That he tried to sexually assault you.

5. Imam

Because her Imam is from her village, Fatima thinks he’ll understand her.

“Marriage is not a contract you can walk away from because you don’t like the terms, it’s a lifelong promise taken in front of God. If you pray harder, things will work out.”

6. Community leader

Community leaders know Fatima’s story.

Ali is an important member of the community, he was a big hero in the war. You got him arrested, Fatima you have no shame, spoiling our name like that, especially in the darkness time that muslim communities is going through in the USA. Don't you know that Syria is one of the banned countries? They will deport him.

7. Child

Fatima's 7 year old daughter hides under the blankets when the violence begins.
"Mama, why don't you cook better so Dad won't get angry at you? Why can't we leave here?"

8. Police

The police says under his breath "God, another Arab that says she is getting beat and then says she lied" When the police come, Ali generally does all the talking.
"Hey lady, now you say your husband is abusing you, that he's been parked outside your house for hours. But, he says you asked him to come and take the kids to school, that he just drove up and parked when you called us.let me see your bruises, pull up your scarf and shirt."

9. Advocate

Fatima's son brought home a brochure from school; when Fatima called, the advocate was very professional.
"We have many programs for women like you, but if you won't decide to leave your husband, I cannot do anything."

10. Immigration attorney

The immigration attorney was also very professional.
"You're scared of your husband because he was in the army and you think he did some scary things in the civil war. That doesn't mean anything for your case"

11. Doctor

The doctor, also very professional, was just as difficult to understand.
"It's not my job to decide if you or your husband caused this big cut on your child's head, I'll let child protective services figure that out."

Narrator asks Fatima "Fatima why do you put up with all this? Why don't you just leave?"

(The actor playing Maya under the blankets replies non-verbally by attempting to move but cannot get up because of the weight of the blankets.)

Empowering

(The Narrator pauses after reading each of the next statements. Then each character steps forward and removes a blanket, and faces into the circle.)

11. Doctor

Fatima I'm your doctor. I looked at your chart and see there are many injuries consistent with domestic violence.

10. Immigration attorney

As your immigration attorney, I can help you get immigration relief without asking your husband.

9. Advocate

"I'm your advocate Fatima. It's best not to make a big decision when you are in a crisis. Tell me, what would be helpful to you?" Do you have any other support system?

8. Police

please tell me what language you speak so I can get you an interpreter and victim services. "I have arrested your husband Fatima; What else can I do for you to make this less difficult? Do you feel safe staying home?"

7. Child

"Fatima Dad is so mean to you, he's scaring me. Why doesn't he stop?"

6. Community leader

"Because I'm a leader in our community; I used my authority to tell Ali he does not have our permission to treat you like this, even if our culture says it's OK. If he wants our respect, he has to earn it back. You did not get him arrested, his behavior did."

5. Imam

"As your Imam I'm here to support you, Fatima. I talked to Ali to remind him it is also his duty to be a caring spouse and father instead of terrifying you and the children. Being traumatized in the war is no excuse for battering you."

4. His mother, Fatima's mother-in-law

I have worried for the longest time that Ali learnt his abusive ways from his dad. And I just pretended not to notice that my husband was sexually harassing you.

3. Neighbor

We can help out by watching the children when you have to work late. Let them come over to our apartment and we'll cook their favorite food. When you come home, there will be some for you too.

2. Her mother

Fatima, you did try, he didn't. Your stubbornness is your strength. If I was in your shoes, I don't know if I would have struggled for so long.

1. Friend

All those times I saw your wounds – physical and emotional – I didn't do anything. But you did. You are such a powerful woman, Fatima

Fatima gets up and stands encircled by her supporters.

Audience Discussion

Invite audience to discuss and comment on their reactions. Be sure to ask the actors, especially Maya, how they felt.

This skit can be used to raise awareness about:

- Domestic violence
- Victim-blaming by family and community members
- What a difference support can make
- Women's experiences of oppression and liberation
- Harms that everyone suffers
- Empowerment that strengthens everyone

Permission to adapt this script for different communities is granted.

The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence would appreciate if you let us know you used *Blanketed by Blame, Empowered by Support* and if you adapted it. Please send us the adapted version at info@api-gbv.org. Thank you.