

Many survivors of domestic violence experience religion, faith, and/or spirituality as distinctive elements of their identity and personal lives.

Of 151 battered women interviewed for a study, the overwhelming majority (97%) noted that spirituality or God was a source of strength or comfort for them, with 76% reporting "a great deal."

Regardless of their particular faith or religious affiliation, alongside the trauma of violence, many survivors of domestic violence will be dealing with some aspect of religious beliefs and teachings that will serve either as a resource or a roadblock to freeing themselves from abuse.

Some survivors will find strength to cope with, heal from, break free from, and/or remain free from abusive relationships through their spirituality and/or engagement in religious community.

We also know that religion can be misused to excuse or condone abusive behavior in the following ways:

Survivors should not be expected to choose between safety and their religious community or tradition; they should be able to access the resources of both secular advocacy programs and their faith-based communities.

A survey of 423 women about their experiences of victimization and help seeking found that 40% of them sought religious or spiritual counseling following their victimization. Recipients ranked religious or spiritual counseling among the most helpful services or resources received.

Some survivors have reported that church support and involvement have been instrumental in their recovery from domestic violence. Their religious communities offered emotional comfort, a sense of belonging, security, and practical assistance (e.g., financial, shelter).

Religious involvement appears to promote greater psychological wellbeing for domestic violence survivors, including greater quality of life and decreased depression. For women of color, greater religious involvement is also related to increased social support.

Resources available in our community to honor and support the spiritual and religious needs of domestic violence survivors include:

How can faith or spirituality be a resource for domestic violence survivors?

Collaboration between secular programs and faith-based communities is critical to adequately responding to the multiple needs of domestic violence survivors.

Religious leaders and secular advocates who work together to address domestic violence can help victims heal and recover. Cross-training and education are very useful for raising awareness of domestic violence, identifying allies and building collaborative relationships between secular advocates and religious leaders in the community.

Clergy and lay leaders need to hold perpetrators accountable when they come to them seeking counsel or are identified by survivors. Religious leaders can condemn abusive behavior while simultaneously motivating help-seeking and referring perpetrators to appropriate community resources.

Domestic violence programs should be aware of research which suggests that spirituality is an important tool used by victims to cope and heal from domestic violence.

In our community, anti-violence advocates and faith-based leaders are collaborating in the following ways:

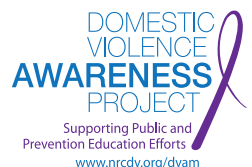
Survivor story or anecdote to illustrate your point:

Program Information:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____



How can faith or spirituality be a resource for domestic violence survivors?

References and Citations

Many survivors of domestic violence experience religion, faith, and/or spirituality as distinctive elements of their identity and personal lives.

- Of 151 battered women interviewed for a study, the overwhelming majority (97%) noted that spirituality or God was a source of strength or comfort for them, with 76% reporting “a great deal.”
Source: Gillum, T. L., Sullivan, C. M., & Bybee, D. I. (2006). The importance of spirituality in the lives of domestic violence survivors. *Violence Against Women*, 12(3), 240-250.
- Regardless of their particular faith or religious affiliation, alongside the trauma of violence, many survivors of domestic violence will be dealing with some aspect of religious beliefs and teachings that will serve either as a resource or a roadblock to freeing themselves from abuse.
Source: Fortune, M. & Enger, C. (2006, March). *Violence Against Women and the Role of Religion*. Harrisburg, PA: VAWnet, a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.
- Some survivors will find strength to cope with, heal from, break free from, and/or remain free from abusive relationships through their spirituality and/or engagement in religious community.
Source: Gillum, T. L. (2009). *The Intersection of Spirituality, Religion and Intimate Partner Violence in the African American Community*. St. Paul, MN: Institute on Domestic Violence in The African American Community.

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Source: Anderson, K. M., Renner, L. M., & Danis, F. S. (2012). Recovery: Resilience and growth in the aftermath of domestic violence. *Violence Against Women*, 18(11), 1279-1299.
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- Domestic violence programs should be aware of research which suggests that spirituality is an important tool used by victims to cope and heal from domestic violence.
Source: Fowler, D. N., Faulkner, M., Learman, J., & Runnels, R. (2011). The influence of spirituality on service utilization and satisfaction for women residing in a domestic violence shelter. *Violence Against Women*, 17(10), 1244–1259.

Additional information

- Resources for working across faith-based communities to address domestic violence (abbreviated listing):

CONNECT Faith
FaithTrust Institute
Safe Havens interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence
Transforming Communities: Technical Assistance, Training, and Resource Center (TC-TAT)