

FAITH RESOURCE SHEET FOR GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PROVIDERS

ISLAM

Faith Distinctions and Practices in Islam

Here are some key points to keep in mind as you engage the Muslim community and men and boys of the Islamic faith in your violence prevention work:

Places of Worship: Mosques (Masjids) and Islamic Centers are the most common venues used for Muslim spaces for worship. Some places of worship may be exclusively dedicated to a specific cultural, linguistic community, or faith tradition within Islam.

Providers should note that non-Muslims may visit a mosque/masjid but would have to follow standard guidelines for covering or taking off their shoes if entering a space where individuals pray. For example, adults are generally segregated by gender and have specific entrances for men and women. In more strict settings, women who are menstruating are not expected to be in a prayer area. Entering an Islamic Center or a section of a mosque/masjid that is not designated for prayer is generally allowed without covering for women and might be less stringent in terms of gender separation, but this varies widely by community and setting. Shoes may be allowed or not depending on the setting. There are usually signs and shoe racks available if you are expected to remove your shoes.

Faith Leaders: The religious leader of a congregation is typically referred to as an Imam, though the title Sheikh may also be used. There is no mandatory formal training for Imams, although they may have university degrees in theology or Islamic Studies. They may also be self-taught. The main task of the Imam is to direct community Friday prayers and specialized rituals during holidays. The Imam may not be tied to a particular place of worship and may not necessarily be paid for his services. Providers should keep in mind that the lack of standardized training and monitoring can create challenges when assessing the extent of knowledge an Imam possesses regarding Islam's teachings on domestic violence. Women cannot serve as Imams in Islam but may be religious leaders or scholars.

Major Religious Holidays: Muslim holidays are calculated based on a lunar calendar, which is determined by the sighting of the moon, causing the holiday dates to vary throughout the year.

- **RAMADAN:** A month-long observance including abstaining from food, drink, sexual activity, smoking, and other forms of refrain from sun-up to sundown. This period includes increased prayer and worship obligations as well as increased acts of charity and kindness. The significance is to remember both the individual's obedience to Allah (God) and the suffering of the less fortunate.
- **EID -AI FITR:** A three-day holiday celebrated after Ramadan which includes a community prayer, visiting family and friends, and exchanging presents or giving gifts of money to children.
- **EID-AL-ADHA:** A five-day celebration feast commemorating the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. It occurs on the tenth day of the Dhu-al-Hijjah, the final month of the lunar calendar, and includes the sacrifice of animals and the sharing of meat with family, neighbors and the needy. Female family members may receive gifts of money from male family members.
- **ASHURA:** A day-long holiday for Shia Muslims including fasting that commemorates the murder and martyrdom of Husayn the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH (Peace Be Upon Him).

Muslim Demographics in the United States

American Muslims are among the most racially and linguistically diverse faith communities in the U.S. and U.S. Territories:

- Muslims number approximately 3.45 million in the U.S. and U.S. Territories.
- 58% of U.S. Muslims adults are first-generation Americans. An additional 18% are second-generation Americans. The first Muslims in the U.S. were African Americans who either retained their West African Islamic traditions or who converted to Islam during the civil rights movement.
- Among U.S. Muslim immigrants, 35% come from South Asia (India, Pakistan, etc.); 23% were born in other parts of the Asia-Pacific region (such as Iran, Indonesia, etc.); 25% come from the Middle East-North Africa region (Palestine, Syria Egypt, Morocco Algeria, and the Gulf States) 9% come from sub-Saharan Africa (Sudan, Somalia, Mali, Ivory Coast, etc.), 4% were born in Europe (Turkey, Bosnia, etc.) and 4% come from elsewhere in the Americas.
- No racial or ethnic group makes up a majority of Muslim American adults:
 - 41% are white, a category that includes those who describe their race as Arab, Middle Eastern, Persian
 - 28% are South Asian
 - 20% are black
 - 8% are Latino/a
 - 3% identify with another race or with multiple races

Islam and Interpersonal Violence

Muslim survivors of interpersonal violence may encounter various obstacles when seeking help and support. Social isolation and fear of the US legal system in new immigrant groups is common. Lack of cultural/religious awareness in shelters and support services — particularly regarding food, hygiene, prayer practices, and the involvement of community members for decision making — may deter them from seeking assistance. Prejudices and misconceptions about the Muslim community, especially post-9/11, often create an unwelcoming atmosphere, and fear of judgment and discrimination further hinders Muslims affected by domestic violence from reaching out for help to mainstream service providers. Additionally, language barriers, lack of transportation, and shelters that do not allow multiple children can make accessing information and services impossible. Addressing these challenges and promoting cultural sensitivity is crucial to reaching and supporting Muslim survivors.

In the context of Islam and interpersonal violence, the Holy Qur'an emphasizes essential principles regarding men and women. Surat al-Nisa' 4:1 highlights the equality of both genders, rejecting any hierarchical distinctions and promoting accountability to God. It advocates for healthy gender relations based on tranquility, affection, and mercy in relationships. Similarly, Surat al-Hujurat 49:13 underscores the equality of all humans, irrespective of gender, race, or class, encouraging a respectful understanding of differences and positive interaction among people.

Common misconceptions or stereotypes about domestic violence in Islam: Many individuals (both in and out of Islam) may incorrectly believe that the father commands more respect than the mother in Muslim families. However, Islam emphasizes equal respect and obedience to both parents, with a deference to the mother in all things. Western colonial rule in Muslim lands could elevate males as dominant household figures, in contrast with the mandates of Islam. Secondly, there is a misconception that physical violence is allowed if a husband perceives his wife is disobedient. This notion is flawed, as Islam advocates peace, love, and compassion within marriage and condemns any form of oppression, violence, or abuse. Another misconception is that Islam considers women as inferior to men. On the contrary, Islam explicitly states that both men and women are equal in the eyes of Allah.

Internally, these misconceptions may discourage an individual affected by domestic violence from reporting within their own community. In the larger community, this creates a dual challenge for individuals impacted by gender-based violence: these misconceptions as well as an aversion to supporting Islamophobic stereotypes may impede a victim from seeking assistance. There are of course also differences in opinions in different families, cultures, ethnicities, and linguistic groups. Intersectionality is critical in terms of education, race, country of origin, trauma history, immigration status, etc. As such it is always best to use cultural brokers from the communities you are working with and allow the individual to be their own cultural expert from whom you seek knowledge.

Cultural and Societal Expectations of Men and Boys and Gender Norms in Islam: The concept of masculinity in Islam encompasses several fundamental principles, including honesty, love and tolerance towards Allah, protection, humility, and respect for one's parents. In Islam males have serious physical, economic, and social responsibilities to protect and provide for the women in their families (mothers, unmarried sisters, aunts, etc.) whenever needed. For example, in inheritance men are given more because they will be expected to use the resources to care for all the women and children in the larger family, while women are not required to contribute from their portion. However, in some Islamic communities, male children receive preference and privileges, which is a result of historical factors.

Engaging men and boys in violence prevention: To effectively engage men and boys in Muslim communities, it is crucial to familiarize yourself with the local Muslim communities, which may be segregated based on ethnicity, race and language, and learn about the existing services available to them. Given that most masjids/mosques/Islamic centers are predominantly led by men, establishing a relationship with the Imam or sheikh serves as an important initial step. In this engagement, encourage men and boys to become allies in advocating for gender equality and actively standing against violence and discrimination in all forms.

Organization's Mission

This information was provided by:

- **KARAMAH:** Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, an organization that seeks to create a global network of advocates for the rights of Muslim women, who are knowledgeable about the gender-equitable principles of Islam, possess the capacity to share this information with others, and are able to advance the cause of Muslim women's rights in legal and social environments.
- **Peaceful Families Project,** a 21 year-old US based non-profit national organization whose mission is to eliminate domestic and family based violence in Muslim communities through Islamic models and values using training, resource development, research and affiliated partnerships representing the entirety of the Muslim ummah.

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