

FAITH RESOURCE SHEET FOR GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PROVIDERS

KOREAN CHRISTIANITY

Cultural Distinctions and Practices in the Korean Christian Community

Domestic violence and sexual assault advocates working within the Korean Christian community should be aware of the following key points as you engage the community and men and boys of faith in your violence prevention work:

Places of Worship: In the Korean Christian community, houses of worship are commonly referred to as “kyo-hwae” or churches. Korean churches also tend to serve as social and community centers.

Spiritual Leaders: Within each church, there are faith leaders who hold different titles that signify their roles and positions in the hierarchy. At the top is the “moksanim,” an ordained pastor responsible for delivering weekly messages and tending to the congregation’s spiritual needs. Assisting them are “jundosanim,” pastors-in-training who typically oversee specific church ministries like small groups, youth programs, or Sunday school. Even though each denomination has its way of ordaining pastors, the norm is for men to serve as moksanim and women as jundosanim for specific departments, usually the education department. Depending on the size of the church, there may be a moksanim in charge of a particular ministry with jundosanim offering support. Additionally, it is common for the pastor’s wife to play a role in caring for and providing emotional support to congregants. Understanding the roles and influence of spiritual leaders in the church hierarchy is essential for advocates to support survivors, raise awareness, and foster a safe environment within the Korean Christian community affected by gender-based violence.

Key Religious Holidays: Within the Korean Christian community, several significant holidays hold special importance. These include Easter, celebrated on the first Sunday following the full moon after the spring equinox; Thanksgiving, observed on the fourth Thursday of November, and Christmas, commemorated on December 25th.

Korean Christian Demographics in the United States

- 71% of Korean Americans are Christian, with 61% of Koreans in the U.S. identifying as Protestant and 10% identifying as Catholic.
- Two-thirds of Korean American Protestants (66%) describe themselves as Evangelical.
- Approximately 69% of Korean Americans are Immigrants, and roughly two-thirds of Korean immigrant adults (66%) arrived in the U.S. over two decades ago.
- Korean Christians live across the U.S., with many residing in Greater Los Angeles and Orange County, California. The majority of Korean Americans live in Los Angeles, New York, Washington, D.C., Seattle, Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta, and Philadelphia.

Sources:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/07/19/asian-americans-a-mosaic-of-faiths-overview/>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2023/05/08/asian-american-identity-appendix-demographic-profile-of-asian-american-adults/>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/chart/top-10-u-s-metropolitan-areas-by-korean-population/>

Faith and Interpersonal Violence

In the Christian community, the emphasis on family values can be a barrier for victims of interpersonal violence. In Korean Christian communities, this emphasis on family values is compounded by Korea's patriarchal culture, creating an imbalance of power between spouses as well as parents and their children. Additionally, the perceived importance of forgiveness can pressure victims into forgiving their abusers. These views create barriers that make it difficult for victims to report their abuse. On top of that, both the victim and the abuser often belong to the same congregation, making it challenging for the church to address violence effectively. Faith leaders often respond to reports by offering family counseling and prayer as a solution. To address these issues, KFAM (Korean American Family Services) is actively educating faith leaders on how to respond to interpersonal violence and why it's crucial for the church to be aware of this issue.

Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention: In this faith community, the leadership is predominantly men who wield considerable influence and control. At KFAM, we are making a conscious effort to actively involve and collaborate with our local faith community to engage men and boys in our shared mission of violence prevention. KFAM's strategies to engage men and boys of faith include finding a partner organization with the same goals, tailoring materials for men and boys, and tackling cultural barriers that foster gender-based violence. KFAM's educational topics include Marriage and Family History, Identity in Christ, How to build a Healthy Marriage, Biblical Manhood, and Keys to Healthy Relationships (focusing on Gender-Based Violence). Through these teachings, men and boys in our community have learned about what it means to be a man or boy of faith and how to have meaningful, healthy relationships free of violence. When engaging the Korean American immigrant faith community, about it is also important to consider cultural issues such as toxic masculinity, patriarchal culture, the "Model Minority" myth, and family-oriented culture, and more, which KFAM addresses in its customized resources for engaging men and boys of faith.

Common Misconceptions or Stereotypes about Domestic Violence: In Korean Christian communities, misconceptions and stereotypes about gender roles persist. One

such stereotype is that men are automatically designated as the heads of their families and are tasked with making all final decisions. Additionally, there exists a pervasive expectation for women to unquestioningly obey their husbands and for children to obey their parents. It is essential for providers to address and challenge these notions to promote a healthier understanding of family dynamics and relationships.

Cultural and Societal Expectations of Men and Boys and Gender Norms: In Korean Christian communities, men often wield significant power, which can at times lead to the justification of violence. Expectations of physical strength and traditional masculinity burden men and boys in our community, as violence is mistakenly associated with power and strength. Our domestic violence organization is dedicated to challenging these toxic notions of masculinity and addressing societal pressures that enforce unhealthy behaviors. We also make sure to promote models of healthy relationships within our community. While recognizing men's roles in protecting their families, we aim to redefine this role to encourage emotional and psychological well-being rather than perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Prepared by Korean American Family Services (KFAM), an organization that works to empower underserved Korean American and Asian Pacific Islander families through culturally responsive programs.

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