

FAITH RESOURCE SHEET FOR GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PROVIDERS

FAITHS IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

Faith(s) Represented:

The various religions, faiths, and spiritual beliefs within the Black community include: Christianity (Catholicism, Protestantism, Evangelical Protestantism, Mainline Protestantism, and historically Black Christianity, which crosses denominational lines such as Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Restorationist, Episcopalian/Anglican, Holiness, Congregationalist, Adventist, Evangelical, and nondenominational branches of Protestantism), Judaism, Afro-Judaism, Islam, The Nation of Islam, Moorish Faith, Santeria, Vodou/Voodoo, Rastafarianism, Buddhism, Jehovah's Witness, Traditional African Religions, and more. It is essential that advocates understand the depth and diversity of faith within the Black community to holistically respond to survivor needs.

Faith Distinctions and Practices

Gender-based violence advocates working with faiths in the Black community should be aware of the following key points:

Places of Worship:

The following places of worship are often used for worship, prayer, religious services, and community activities:

- Churches: Typically associated with Christian denominations
- Temples: Common in various forms of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Voodoo
- Mosques: Places of worship for Muslims
- Synagogues: House of worship in Judaism
- In the Home/Nature: In many faiths, individuals and families may practice their faith at home or in nature

Faith Leaders:

- Babalawo: A Yoruba spiritual leader
- Bishop: A senior clergy member in many Christian denominations
- Elder: Respected faith leader in certain faith traditions
- High Priest/Priestess: Spiritual leader in certain faith traditions
- Imam: Faith leader in Islam
- Iyalorisha: A Yoruba priestess
- Minister: Common faith leader in Christianity
- Mullah: Islamic faith teacher
- Pastor: Leader of a Christian congregation
- Preacher: Someone who delivers sermons and teachings
- Priest: Common faith leader in various religious traditions
- Rabbi: Faith leader in Judaism

Major Religious Holidays:

Major religious holidays in various Black faith groups can vary widely based on the specific religious traditions practiced within these communities. In Christianity, major holidays include Christmas, Easter, and Good Friday. Within Islam, major observances include Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adh. Judaism includes holidays such as Passover (Pesach), Hanukkah, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur. Kwanzaa is another significant holiday in the Black American community and may include elements of faith but is predominantly a celebration of culture and community. Holiday celebrations and festivities are often based in family, ethnic, and cultural traditions and are often seen as communal experiences. The invitation for those outside of the faith tradition to partake in various religious holidays and events may be dependent on the specific holiday (for instance some celebrations or holidays are seen as more sacred and exclusive than others) and on the comfort level of the family or community celebrating.

Faith Demographics in the United States

87% of African-Americans describe themselves as belonging to a religious group. Currently, 8 out of 10 Black Americans identifies as belonging to a Christian denomination. The breakdown of Christian and non-Christian faiths are:

Black Christianity

- Baptist: 45%
- Protestant: 7%
- Jehovah's Witness: 5%
- Methodist: 5%
- Catholics: 5%
- Evangelical: 14%

Non-Christian Faiths

- Muslim : 20-25%
- Jewish : <1%
- Buddhist: <1%
- Hindu: <1%
- Other Faiths: <1%

Faith and Interpersonal Violence

Black women, representing 14% of the U.S. population, account for 31% of domestic violence fatalities, making them nearly three times more likely than white women to be killed by an intimate partner (Violence Policy Center, 2022). Black women face a higher risk of being shot and killed by an intimate partner, being twice as likely as white women (Petrosky et al., 2017). FBI data reveals that Black women aged 18 to 34 are three times more likely than their white counterparts in the same age group to be shot and killed by an intimate partner (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2019).

The development of culturally informed strategies aimed specifically at diverse communities of color is required to effectively address interpersonal violence and homicide (Bent-Goodley, 2021; Waller & Bent-Goodley, 2022). To address the layered violence faced by Black survivors, we must recognize the dual role of faith—acknowledging its potential for control and abuse, while also acknowledging its role as a refuge, support, and community. Advocates may hesitate to engage with faith communities while assisting survivors due to misconceptions. However, refusing collaboration with these communities does not protect Black women or reduce violence rates against them.

Common Misconceptions or Stereotypes in the Black Faith Community:

The Black church has served as a strong pillar in the Black community for many centuries. Christianity has played a pivotal role in shaping the foundation of Black America, influencing the resistance and fight for human rights and as a source of healing. The Black church has served as a safe haven and gathering place during times of oppression and systemic injustice for Black Americans. Islam also has deep roots in the Black American experience, and there is a shift in how faith is defined as immigration from the African Diaspora continues to increase. We've witnessed an expansion and celebration of traditional African faiths and belief systems from Ifa to Olodumare.

Historically, lack of outreach to the Black community by gender-based violence service providers lends itself to the false perception that these organizations cannot meet their needs. However, statistics show that Black females constitute the demographic receiving the highest percentage of services from domestic violence organizations, proving the importance of strategic outreach through culturally specific programs.

It is important to recognize that when Black survivors do engage with advocates, they may face religious bias, stereotypes, and misconceptions about their faith practices. In order for advocates to truly understand and serve survivors, they must be aware of the diversity of faith within the Black community and how abusive partners may manipulate faith, religious texts, and faith practices to control their partners. Having a broader and more comprehensive understanding of faith within the Black community will allow for more appropriate, holistic, and comprehensive responses to survivors.

Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention:

Ujima's organizational response to violence within faith communities is to encourage, equip, and empower. Ujima has identified strategies for: trust building and engagement between domestic violence programs and faith leaders; maintaining engagement of faith leaders; and addressing myths and challenges to domestic violence/sexual assault programming in a faith-based setting. Many of these strategies were informed through conversation with both survivors of violence and roundtable convenings with faith leaders from various denominations and practices. Directly addressing the intersections of interpersonal violence, systemic violence, and religious violence with faith leaders has been a useful tool in engaging men and boys. Within the Black community there are deep ties between faith institutions and social and racial justice movements. Framing the intersections of violence and the role of faith communities in promoting non-violence and accountability is crucial for shifting perspectives and driving change. When faith leaders emphasize patriarchy, notions of submissiveness, and cultural violence from their faith perspective, survivor voices are better heard and centered in the faith community. While the approach will be unique to every faith community, the foundational work around encouraging, equipping, and empowering faith leaders can remain consistent.

Recommendations for community-based programs include: providing space for survivors to practice their faith, religion, and/or spirituality individually or within a larger body e.g., meetings, meditation, food preparation, separate and clean etc. Community-based programs can also help to bridge the gap between survivors and service providers by facilitating access to faith services, providing transportation, technology, and safety planning (guided and informed by programs doing domestic and sexual violence work). Furthermore, local community-based programs can establish meaningful partnerships with faith-based leaders and communities that center the needs of survivors.

Faith-Based Institutions can support survivors within their faith community in many ways. Faith leaders can partner with local and culturally specific programs to understand the dynamics of domestic and sexual violence and to develop a plan to address disclosures to keep survivors safe and hold perpetrators accountable. They can implement prevention initiatives that are grounded in trauma-informed, survivor-centered, and culturally responsive strategies, e.g., community events, healthy relationship programs for teens and children, educational luncheons about intimate partner violence. Publicly condemning domestic and sexual violence and reinforcing this message in women's and men's groups increases accountability. Lastly, faith leaders should develop a plan to address violence perpetrated by faith leaders or officers of the faith institution.

Regarding mobilizing the Black faith community, Ujima provides training, workshops, and webinars on supporting Black survivors of faith. Ujima also participates in community engagement events and community conversations and encourage faith communities and faith leaders to have dialogue around questions such as:

- How has religious bias impacted survivors?
- How can the faith community be a critical resource during safety planning?
- How would you describe the current relationship between the interfaith community and gender-based violence programs? What would you like to see change?

Prepared By: Ujima Inc., The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community seeks to be inclusive and responsive to the diversity of faith-based practices represented throughout the African Diaspora. We recognize that various religions, faiths, and spiritual beliefs that exist within the Black community, such as: Christianity (Catholicism, Protestantism - Evangelical, Mainline, and historically Black Christianity, which crosses denominational lines such as Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Restorationist, Episcopalian/Anglican, Holiness, Congregationalist, Adventist, Evangelical, and nondenominational branches of Protestantism), Judaism, Afro-Judaism, Islam, The Nation of Islam, Moorish Faith, Santeria, Vodou/Voodoo, Rastafarianism, Buddhist, Jehovah's Witness, Traditional African Religions, and more.

Organization's Mission: The mission of the National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community is to mobilize the community to respond to and end domestic, sexual, and community violence in the Black community. We actualize this mission through research, public awareness and community engagement, and resource development. Ujima serves as a resource to survivors of violence, advocates and service providers, and the community at-large.

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