

A TOOLKIT FOR IPV PROVIDERS

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RELIGION, COLLABORATION, AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY



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Background

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) has long and far reaching effects in the lives of survivors. Yet those effects are often different based on immigration experience, cultural and socioeconomic background, and social support. For immigrant communities in particular, the benefits of many formal resources remain inaccessible due to structural challenges such as economic immobility, immigration status, and language barriers.

The relationship between abuse and immigration policy may leave such survivors in particularly impossible situations.

Yet freedom from IPV is more than just structurally challenging—it is physically and spiritually costly. Healing from violence is socially, culturally, and spiritually complex.

Both formal and informal supports can greatly assist in helping immigrant survivors move forward with their lives. Survivors with less access to formal resources may especially turn to informal supports such as faith-based communities. Spiritual practices and the belief in a higher power can be significant sources of comfort that contribute to psychological well-being. IPV providers need to engage more readily with this spiritual component particularly as part of their cultural competency.

OUR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This toolkit provides a guide for how IPV providers can begin collaborating with religious leaders and congregations to support religious survivors in their community. While their missions may differ, this guide highlights how providers and religious leaders can find shared goals on which to build these bridges. Both providers and religious leaders are invested in the overall well-being of the people they serve and have a commitment to helping those in their care. Finding common ground and forming a collaborative relationship therefore helps religious survivors benefit from both their spirituality and formal IPV supports.

How to use

THIS SECTION INCLUDES A GUIDE FOR HOW TO UTILIZE THE PROVIDED INFORMATION

Building on prior research findings from anthropology, social work, and various other fields, this guide draws on insights from twelve months of qualitative research with Latina immigrant survivors and providers at an IPV crisis center in Connecticut along with additional formal and religious providers in the community. This study revealed how the long-term well-being of Latina immigrant survivors was supported by:

- a.) Christian spiritual practices and beliefs;
- b.) long-term, formal domestic violence services; and
- c.) religious leaders that were empathetic and knowledgeable about domestic violence and its far-reaching effects.

While these findings are based on a particular population and this guide has not been empirically tested, these suggestions come from the author's extensive observations and conversations throughout this study, her years of work as a practitioner and researcher in the domestic violence field, and support from prior related studies. These tools are meant as a starting point that can be adapted to the particular needs of individual IPV centers, their client base, and their program missions and goals.

Recognizing Religion in Client-Centered and Culturally Competent IPV Practice

It is important to recognize how many IPV clients may hold spiritual beliefs and follow religious practices that can impact their decision making around IPV. Thus, providers must come to understand the beliefs of each particular client. While at times these beliefs may conflict with the ideals of the IPV center, recognizing those beliefs is an important step towards developing client-centered and culturally competent services that take advantage of the benefits of spirituality when facing IPV. Spiritual practices can be a source of comfort and relief for many survivors of IPV. Moreover, faith-based communities can be a vital long-term resource. These communities can provide support alongside social services or when social services are unavailable. This is especially true for immigrants and refugees, who have less access to formal resources. Providers may find that religious survivors derive benefits such as:

- Regular prayer can be a source of healing
- Believing in a higher power can provide a sense of strength and purpose
- Belonging to a community can provide valuable resources in the short and long-term
- Having access to a community with shared values, experiences, and perspectives can be a source of comfort and validation

Finding Common Ground

Both IPV providers and religious leaders may have incomplete understandings about each other's perspectives on IPV. It is important to listen to each other's perspectives and understand each other's priorities. Religious communities and IPV providers can both support survivors. Each must educate the other on what supports they can provide and why they approach their work in particular ways. Once this understanding is established, points of common ground should be identified. Questions for IPV providers to ask religious leaders may include:

- What do you consider to be IPV? Are there aspects of IPV that you would like to better understand?
- Are there teachings in your faith that directly or indirectly relate to IPV?
- How might a survivor understand IPV within your faith's teachings? How might this affect the way they react to that violence? Would this prevent them from seeking help?
- Have you ever come across IPV within your congregation? If so, how have you addressed this issue in the past, and why?
- Do congregants come to you for advising about IPV? Is this usually the survivor, the aggressor, or both? What do you do in each case?
- Do you know about the services we provide? Do you have concerns about these services?
- Have your congregants sought out our services? Have they ever expressed positive or negative experiences?
- How can I help support your efforts to educate and protect the safety of your congregants?

Engaging in Collaboration

When IPV service providers form partnerships with faith-based communities, this can help religious leaders and congregations better support survivors, as well as connect more survivors to formal services. Providers can also learn more about how to work with survivors who hold different religious beliefs and follow various faith practices. These partnerships can create better understanding and common ground. Such benefits include:

- Education for practitioners (i.e. how to best understand and work with survivors from that religious community)
- Education for religious leaders and religious communities (i.e. what is IPV, safety, and other key topics)
- Increased outreach to survivors not receiving services
- Increased allies for survivors in the community

Building Partnerships

IPV providers and religious leaders should use this common ground to develop a plan for maximizing their shared goals. Determine the areas of need, and how each institution can support the other to meet those needs. To meet those needs, both sides should engage in ongoing outreach and education. For example, advocates can provide education to congregants, while religious leaders can educate crisis center staff. Such educational workshops that IPV providers can offer may include:

- IPV 101: Basic education around the dynamics of an abusive relationship
- Safety Planning: How to maximize safety in a relationship and how to support a family member or friend in an abusive relationship
- Community Services: An overview of all available resources for survivors of IPV

Resources

THIS SECTION INCLUDES RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING AND INFORMATION

Religious providers may also want to further educate themselves about how they can help survivors in their community. You can refer them to the following resources:

FaithTrust Institute

FaithTrust Institute is a national, multifait, multicultural training and education organization with global reach working to end sexual and domestic violence(faithtrustinstitute.org)

Visit: <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/>

VAWNet Special Collection on Domestic Violence and Religion

This special collection outlines how faith leaders from many different spiritual communities can become effective allies in the prevention and intervention of domestic violence in their communities(vawnet.org)

Visit: <https://vawnet.org/sc/domestic-violence-and-religion>



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Conclusion

For many survivors of IPV, religion is an important component to their recovery. Spiritual practices can be a source of comfort and relief while faith-based communities can be a vital long-term resource. This is particularly true for immigrants and refugees, who have less access to formal resources. While there are some resources available for religious leaders interested in working with IPV service providers and educating themselves on how to support survivors, there are fewer resources for IPV providers looking to better collaborate with communities of faith. This brief toolkit offers a starting point for building these partnerships from the practitioner perspective. It is important for IPV providers to regularly engage in meaningful conversations with clients to understand their spiritual practices and beliefs to develop client-centered, culturally competent services. They can then use this understanding as a basis for reaching out to local congregations and religious leaders, forming collaborative partnerships based on common ground, and sustaining those relationships for the well-being of current and future clients in those religious communities.

Thank you.