

Ramadan's Significance for Muslim Survivors of Gender Based Violence

The Holy Month of Ramadan

April 1-May 1, 2022

Ramadan, the 9th month of the Islamic calendar, is a time of fasting, which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Muslim holidays occur on a lunar calendar, so this holiday does not occur on the same date every year per the Gregorian calendar. During Ramadan, practicing Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset by not eating or drinking. Those exempted from fasting include young children, menstruating women, individuals who are pregnant, the elderly, and the sick. This month is also a time to refrain from vain talk, expressing anger, and other behaviors that may not fall within moral composure. During Ramadan, practicing Muslims tend to increase their religious observances like offering additional prayers and engaging in intensive reading sessions of the Quran. (Alghafli, et al., 2019)

Significance for Muslim Survivors of Gender Based Violence

During this holy month, Muslims are looking to connect closer with God as it is a time of mercy and encouraging kindness. Although this month is intentional about behaviors, it can also be a time where the harm doer's abuse tactics can intensify. An example of this is blackmailing the survivor to believe that the abuse they are experiencing is religiously correct, despite the fact that domestic violence is against the teachings of the Islamic faith (the Qur'an states the purpose of marriage itself is a dwelling in tranquility).¹ As with any abusive relationship, the abuse is also exacerbated if other elements of the survivor's identity (i.e., sexual orientation, ethnicity, immigration status, etc.) are intersecting.

As domestic/sexual violence service providers, it is imperative to understand the unique barriers Muslim survivors may face when trying to access services and/or safety considerations needed to provide culturally responsive services. Below are some suggestions on how your agency can improve its capacity to meet the needs of Muslim survivors.

Survivor Engagement

○ Recognize Abuse Tactics

Being aware of the possible additional tactics that practicing Muslims may encounter by the person causing harm such as:²

- Misusing religious texts to gain dominance
- Telling children that the parent is not a "good" Muslim
- Interrupting immigration proceedings
- Invoking cultural and religious customs to regulate behavior
- Employing death threats to family who are living in their native country
- Be mindful of intergenerational households—extended family members may be involved in the relations between survivor and the person causing harm

¹ <https://time.com/2954244/ramadan-day-7-the-tragedy-of-domestic-violence/>

² http://www.ncdsv.org/images/PFP_MuslimPowerAndControlWheel.pdf

- Abusers, and sometimes religious leaders, may misuse faith-based language to manipulate and coerce victims to stay in an unsafe relationship.
- Since Muslims' routines change in Ramadan, advocates can check in with clients to see when appointments would be most appropriate.
 - Many Muslims who observe Ramadan stay up late praying and scheduling appointments in the morning (before 12 p.m.) is not advised; families may not say so, but it's preferable to ask them if this is the only time that works for staff
 - Best time to schedule appointments for families observing is between the hours of 12-5 p.m.
 - One hour or two hours prior to Iftar (break fast), it is recommended to contact the family as they may be preparing for dinner or conducting prayers
 - Due to staying up to pray or the time shift in eating, some individuals may be sleeping. Do not feel discouraged if they are not responding to you
 - Avoid making appointments during prayer time
- Honor the spirituality of the client and do not minimize religious practices and cultural viewpoints.
- Staff of same gender identity as the survivor is preferable, as well as using the native language of the survivor.
- Providing psychoeducation and counseling around domestic violence, while using the culturally appropriate [Muslim Power and Control Wheel](#), would allow survivors to identify that they may be in an abusive relationship.
- Home Visits
 - Do not walk with your street shoes in the survivor's home
 - Do not extend your hands for greeting unless they do so first

Considerations for Shelters

- Consider shifting schedule/space to accommodate Muslim survivors; consider the need for:
 - Clean spaces to conduct washing before prayers
 - Clean and confidential spaces for prayers
 - Do not walk in front of a person praying
- Food/Kitchen Space
 - It's traditional for Muslims to break their fast with dates. Shelters can make Muslim survivors feel supported by providing them with dates and other foods related to Ramadan
 - Being mindful of not eating, drinking, or preparing food while people are fasting
 - During Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset so Muslim survivors may need flexible access to kitchen/food during the pre-dawn time and post dawn to prepare for their fasting

Programmatic

- Muslim holidays occur based on the lunar calendar, so the holidays do not occur on the same date every year.
- During this month, you may want to consider events that can appeal to survivors and accommodate their schedule/need. Below are some recommendations:
 - Break fast (*Iftar*) event
 - Have culturally specific food items for the event and allow survivors to get access to information on safety and support if they are experiencing domestic or sexual violence
 - Time is dependent on geographical location, but fasting ends at sunset
 - Qu'ran reading
 - This can be in collaboration with a mosque or other Muslim focused organizations
 - Hosting volunteer opportunities
 - During Ramadan, practicing Muslims are encouraged to self-reflect and be “their best selves”
 - Avoid events such as dances, events that include food during the day, parties, etc.
 - Check in with local mosques to drop off resource and service information
 - Connect with local culturally specific agencies that work with Muslim community members and share your agency's information and how to make a referral

Staff & Agency Skill Development

- Training and Technical Assistance
 - It is important to provide foundational training for ALL staff on engaging with Muslim communities; includes administrative staff and frontline staff.
 - Training and technical assistance should not be a one-time offering, but instead an ongoing and integral component of staff development; this is done by intentionally scheduling trainings on providing population-specific training regularly.
- Audit Physical Space
 - Work with a culturally specific agency that has expertise in serving Muslim communities to review agency material and physical space to ensure it is culturally inclusive

Additional Resources

Resource Name	Focus	Link
Peaceful Families Project	Agency geared towards ending all types of abuse in Muslim families	https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/pfp-publications.html
Arab-American Family Support Center	Agency based in NYC that provides culturally specific services for multigenerational immigrants and refugees	https://www.aafscny.org/
Heart to Grow	Agency that aims to advance reproductive justice for Muslim communities	https://hearttogrow.org/
The Hurma Project	Provide education on sexual violence specific to Muslim settings	https://hurmaproject.com/
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence (API GBV)	Culturally specific agency that aims to address needs of Asian and Pacific Islanders	https://www.api-gbv.org/
Institute for Muslim Mental Health	Focuses on intersections of being Muslim and mental health	https://muslimmentalhealth.com/
Survivor Toolkit	Toolkit for survivors who are practicing Muslims	https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/dv-survivors-toolkit.html
Ramadan & Eid in North America	Lunar calendar to identify dates for Ramadan	https://moonsighting.com/ramadan-eid.html
How Can Domestic Violence Advocates Better Serve Muslim Women in Shelter?	Article on promising practices	https://vawnet.org/news/how-can-domestic-violence-advocates-better-serve-muslim-women-shelter
Directory of Domestic & Gender-Based Violence Programs Serving Asians and Pacific Islanders	Directory of agencies across the country	https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/directory-api-services/
Ramadan Community Care Toolkit	Guide to staying connected during Ramadan and experiencing increase in physical isolation	https://hearttogrow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Community-Care-Toolkit-7.pdf