Faith and Violence Against Women and Girls Coalition's Research

More than a Hope and a Prayer

Faith, Safety and Support for Survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls





FAITH AND VAWG COALITION

November, 2026

In memory of Dr Ava Kanyeredzi

This report is dedicated to Dr Ava Kanyeredzi, a valued partner and faithful feminist, who was taken from us far too soon. Ava's research with Joanne Wilson on Black churches and domestic abuse helped to lay the foundations for this field, and her work is cited throughout these pages. Her scholarship, care and conviction continue to shape how we listen to survivors of faith, and how we work towards their safety.

More than a Hope and a Prayer

Faith, Safety and Support for Survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls

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At a glance

Survivors from faith backgrounds often turn to faith leaders first, then meet a VAWG sector that rarely builds their faith into keeping them safe. Too many are left choosing between faith and safety.

78%

of VAWG professionals we surveyed ask women about their faith...

Our survey of 40 professionals

10%

...but only four responses described using it in risk assessment and safety planning.

Our survey of 40 professionals

73%

of VAWG professionals have no contact with faith leaders at all.

Our survey of 40 professionals

0

respondents mentioned spiritual abuse.

Our survey of 40 professionals

2 in 7

people considered their church equipped to manage a disclosure of domestic abuse.

Oakley and Wright 2023

60%

of Christian victim-survivors in one study had experienced spiritual abuse.

Oakley and Wright 2023

What needs to change

1. Build faith literacy across the VAWG sector, including training on spiritual abuse.
2. Strengthen referral pathways between faith communities and specialist services.
3. Make sure survivors from faith backgrounds are included in safety planning and safeguarding responses.

Introduction

The Faith and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Coalition is the UK's independent authority on faith literacy in VAWG. We are a coalition of more than 70 organisations and individuals who believe faith and minoritised communities have a vital role to play in ending violence against women and girls. We work to build a movement of specialist organisations within and across communities to end all forms of VAWG, including domestic abuse and sexual violence.

We recognise and bridge the gap between women's services, secular agencies and faith communities, a gap that creates barriers to lifesaving support, to ensure holistic support for survivors from faith backgrounds. The Faith and VAWG Coalition aspires to a world where all women and girls are free from all forms of violence and abuse.

The current approach in this country to increasing safety for survivors and their children and holding perpetrators to account is the Co-ordinated Community Response (CCR), which works as a framework for a whole-systems response to domestic abuse. This is echoed in the cross-government VAWG strategy, which calls for a 'whole of society approach' (Home Office 2025). We would suggest that this approach can only be deemed effective if it works to make all survivors safer.

> **A 'whole of society approach' can only be deemed effective if it works to make all survivors safer.**

However, numerous studies have indicated that some survivors experience disproportionate levels of harm and increased barriers to support, including Black and minoritised women, migrant women, LGBT+ survivors and those with disabilities (Imkaan 2020; Imkaan and CWJ 2023; Joint VAWG Sector Organisations 2023; Galop 2023; CWASU 2023).

Despite religion being a protected characteristic, there is currently limited information on the experiences of survivors from faith backgrounds in the UK, and much of what exists focuses on women within a specific faith. They are also largely absent from mainstream policy and practice guidance

Although there are contextual differences in experiences, one of the key learnings from the Faith and VAWG Coalition is the commonalities across faiths, based on patriarchal hierarchies and secular assumptions.





In this paper, we will examine the experiences of survivors of VAWG from faith backgrounds and the barriers they face in accessing support and safety.

Context

Research shows that faith and spirituality can be an important source of resilience and recovery for survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG (Anderson et al. 2012; Gillum et al. 2006). For many women, faith functions as a protective factor and a source of community support. In an increasingly hostile environment for women of faith, evidenced by rising antisemitism, Islamophobia, and racially motivated attacks on women, faith communities can also play a critical role in shaping women's sense of safety, identity and belonging.

At the same time, faith and religion can be weaponised to control and harm women. Spiritual abuse is a recognised form of abuse experienced by some women of faith, including the misuse of religious texts, doctrines or authority to justify violence or coercive control (Oakley et al. 2014). Research also highlights that patriarchal interpretations of religion can reinforce gender inequality and inhibit women from seeking support (Nason-Clark 2009).

How we define spiritual abuse

The Faith and VAWG Coalition defines spiritual abuse as 'a tool of power and control that can present as a form of domestic abuse and an exacerbating factor in physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, which uses religion, culture and faith systems to control and subjugate a victim. It is often characterised by a systemic pattern of coercive or controlling behaviour that can take place within a faith and/orspiritual context.'

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 statutory guidance also recognises abuse relating to faith, including 'manipulation and exploitation through the influence of religion' (Home Office 2022).

For many women, faith leaders and faith settings are contexts where abuse is disclosed for the first time. Research and survivor testimony indicate that trusted community figures, including clergy and faith leaders, are often approached before statutory services, particularly where family honour, immigration status or community stigma are factors (Nason-Clark 2009; Faith and VAWG Coalition 2021). They may also avoid seeking help from secular services if they believe they will be misunderstood or have their faith, culture or

immigration circumstances stigmatised. It is, therefore, crucial to ensure women receive the correct response when they are seeking support, especially upon first disclosure.

Methods

To inform this research, we ran two surveys: one aimed at frontline workers in the VAWG sector, and one with Faith and VAWG Coalition members. VAWG sector practitioners included those who work in larger, mainstream organisations and in smaller 'by and for' agencies.

Our members include a wide diversity of individuals and organisations, including those working within the VAWG sector, 'by and for' led organisations, faith-based 'by and for' ending VAWG organisations, faith organisations, community organisations, activists and academics. They include people from a variety of faiths and none and hold a vast amount of expertise in VAWG and in faith, many of them working directly with victim-survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG. We received 40 responses to our VAWG sector survey and 13 from our members.

In addition, we asked a small group of survivors of VAWG from faith backgrounds to respond to three questions, incorporating information on who had supported them when they were experiencing abuse, what could have been done differently, and whether their faith helped and/or hindered their experience. This was added to previously unpublished information from a panel of survivors facilitated by the Faith and VAWG Coalition. Survivors who participated were all female and from a range of faith backgrounds. No names or identifying information are used in this paper to protect the anonymity of those who participated in the research.

Survey one Frontline VAWG workers

40 responses

Survey two Faith and VAWG Coalition members

13 responses

Anonymous survivors' voices

Research: More than a Hope and a Prayer

Findings

The findings focus on the barriers for survivors from faith backgrounds, and how both faith institutions and the VAWG sector can respond more effectively to improve safety. This includes improving understanding of how faith and VAWG intersect, strengthening referral pathways and working collaboratively with specialist faith and VAWG organisations.

CHAPTER 1: Hope and Hindrance

The role of faith in survivors' help-seeking

Faith and faith institutions can be a source of support for survivors of VAWG

Survivors of VAWG told us that their faith is a source of resilience and strength, particularly during difficult times in their lives. They identified that having a belief in God and carrying out practices such as prayer gave them comfort when they needed it. Several noted that the act of praying or attending their faith space supported their mental wellbeing, mitigating stress and strengthening their ability to continue despite the abuse they were experiencing. This echoes findings by Gillum et al. (2006), which found a connection between faith and improved mental health. Faith as a form of hope was highlighted by several survivors, with some elaborating that this looked like a path to a better life or even an ability to stay alive.

> **For some survivors, faith was a path to a better life, or even an ability to stay alive.**

Some survivors of VAWG told us about the direct support they had received from faith leaders or faith communities. This ranged from practical support to a more general sense of being part of a supportive community. This echoes previous findings that being part of a group, such as a faith group, can provide support to women experiencing abuse (Runcan et al. 2025).

Faith communities have been found to provide support with issues ranging from housing and health to social, economic, spiritual and counselling support (Vaughan et al. 2020). Help with housing was identified by survivors in this research as an important practical support,





alongside signposting to specialist domestic abuse services. Practices such as praying together gave some women a sense of connectedness and a feeling of being supported.

Several survivors highlighted the role of women, including female pastors and women within the wider faith community. An awareness that other women had had similar experiences also helped. This brings to light the importance of female support within faith communities. Shaw et al.'s (2022) study of Black female Christian clergy in the US found that their support for women experiencing abuse enabled women within the congregation to support each other. This was perceived by female clergy as a particularly invaluable resource, given that secular services were unable to meet women's religious and spiritual needs.

One woman in our research explicitly connected the importance of the support she received to being a migrant. Women with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) often have extremely limited options due to their immigration status prohibiting them from accessing crucial services such as housing and benefit assistance. Barriers such as fear of being deported or having children removed, alongside language and cultural barriers, can hinder women from engaging with statutory services, meaning that faith communities often have a key role in enabling support. Faith spaces can be vital to migrant women, who may experience stigma, hostility and racism compounding the abuse from a partner, ex-partner or family member. For women with NRPF, faith communities often provide a lifeline through practical help, including through foodbanks, access to temporary accommodation and finances, alongside spiritual and emotional support.

Faith and faith institutions as a hindrance to safety for survivors of VAWG

Research shows that faith leaders are likely to encounter domestic abuse in their communities (Clarke and Wendt 2026), and women are more likely to disclose abuse to a faith leader than to statutory services (Cox 2015; Faith and VAWG Coalition 2021). However, women of faith are also more likely to stay in abusive relationships for longer (Kanyeredzi and Wilson 2023).

> **Women are more likely to disclose abuse to a faith leader than to statutory services.**

Our members and the survivors we spoke to indicated why this might be the case, highlighting concerns about women being ignored, not believed or not taken seriously by faith leaders. In addition, some are actively discouraged from accessing support from statutory or secular agencies. Concern regarding reputational damage was raised as a possible reason for this, in the context of avoiding stigma and scrutiny amongst widespread

negative narratives about a faith. Survivors themselves may also hold these concerns, fearing betraying, or being seen to betray, their community. In some cases, this may intersect with additional barriers such as immigration status and fear of discrimination.

Barriers faced by women of faith

Concerns about being ignored or not believed by faith leaders

Discouraged from accessing support from secular services

Sanctity of marriage or doctrine is prized over women's safety

Faith texts are used to manipulate women or reinforce gender hierarchy

Reconciliation is considered more important than safety

Several members highlighted that the sanctity of marriage and doctrine about submission, marriage and divorce are often prized over women's safety. This issue, previously highlighted as a concern in research, can lead to pressure to remain with abusive husbands (Westenberg 2017). This may be internalised by women, including one of the survivors we spoke to, who told us that she stayed in a relationship for longer due to her belief in the sanctity of marriage.

Faith texts can also be used in a range of ways to manipulate or dismiss women. Whilst perpetrators of spiritual abuse commonly use religious texts to justify their behaviour (Westenberg 2017), negative responses from faith leaders can compound this. Survivors may have inaccurate understandings of religious texts and their faith due to interpretations from the perpetrator and faith leaders and may not feel that they have the religious authority or literacy to disagree. If they do attempt to challenge these interpretations, they may face dismissal or be accused of going against God or their faith. Religious texts can also be used more widely by faith leaders and communities to reinforce gender hierarchies and misogyny, which, if internalised by survivors, may make it more difficult for them to identify and leave abusive situations. One survivor and several of our members told us that they believe that, in some faith institutions, reconciliation is considered more important than safety.





Our members highlighted a range of reasons why faith leaders or communities may not respond to VAWG appropriately. Research from the University of Chester alongside our member organisation, Restored, found that only two in seven people considered their church equipped to manage a disclosure of domestic abuse (Oakley and Wright 2023). For some, there may be an intention to help but a concern about 'getting it wrong'. There may also be a lack of understanding about safeguarding, and specifically the dynamics of VAWG. Whilst this can stem from the misuse of theology or particularly patriarchal framings, some faith leaders may simply have common societal assumptions about domestic abuse and VAWG.

Several members highlighted that faith leaders can lack understanding of specific types of VAWG, such as harmful practices, and, more specifically, how faith and VAWG interact. For example, they may not understand the scriptural barriers that prevent women from feeling that they are able to leave an abusive relationship. The lack of available training for faith leaders and communities was highlighted, but also that there may be a distrust of outside agencies, so consideration needs to be given to how this is offered and carried out. Several members also highlighted that faith leaders and communities have the potential to hold perpetrators to account, but often lack the knowledge, confidence and tools to do so.

Faith leaders and communities have the potential to hold perpetrators to account, but often lack the knowledge, confidence and tools to do so.

What can faith leaders do to support survivors of domestic abuse and hold perpetrators to account?

Survivors told us that one of the most important ways they could be supported was to be believed and validated, both individually and by giving messages to the wider community that abuse is unacceptable. They highlighted the need to be given practical support, including help to contact specialist services. To do this, faith leaders need to have an awareness of relevant services, what they offer and how to support women to access them. Improved relationships between faith organisations and services such as specialist domestic abuse services were highlighted by several of our members as important to providing more effective support to survivors.

One survivor also emphasised the importance of curiosity on the part of faith leaders, such as checking with them if there are indicators of abuse. It was emphasised that this needs to exist alongside a basic understanding of women's needs, such as not arranging meetings with them when there is an absence of available childcare.





Research suggests that making VAWG visible in faith spaces increases disclosure, for example through sermons, prayers and church meetings (Kanyeredzi and Wilson 2023; Istratii and Ali 2023). Despite this, one study found that less than half of churchgoers had heard domestic abuse referenced in these spaces (Oakley and Wright 2023). In particular, faith leaders need to understand how to use religious texts to condemn abuse, giving clear messages that it is unacceptable.

<1 in 2

churchgoers had heard domestic abuse referenced in their faith space, even though making VAWG visible there increases disclosure.

Oakley and Wright 2023

The need for training for faith leaders on VAWG has been highlighted by numerous studies (Shannon-Lewy and Dull 2005; Kanyeredzi and Wilson 2023; Aune and Barnes 2018), but this needs to be supplemented with effective policies and ongoing support (Kanyeredzi and Wilson 2023). Faith leaders also need to understand the breadth of VAWG, including harmful practices such as spiritual abuse.

We are aware that there are many faith leaders who are interested in improving safeguarding and support for survivors of VAWG but have limited capacity or funding to do so. For this to be addressed effectively, there is a need for a national faith-literate framework that acknowledges the role of faith institutions in responding to VAWG and provides guidance to both faith institutions and statutory services. We are calling for this in our policy briefing: Strengthening the UK Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Girls: Integrating Faith Communities into Prevention, Support and Accountability.





CHAPTER 2: Beyond Hope

How the VAWG sector can protect survivors from faith backgrounds

VAWG sector responses to survivors from faith backgrounds

As part of this research, we surveyed 40 professionals working in the VAWG sector or in VAWG-related roles. The majority told us that they felt confident in meeting the needs of women of faith at least sometimes (55%), with 28% confident that they always met their needs. Most services asked women about their faith (78%), with 68% also asking about the needs arising from their faith. However, in the majority of cases, this did not appear to feed into mitigating women's risk or improving safety.

How confident VAWG sector professionals feel in meeting the needs of women of faith



5% of respondents stated that although women were asked about their faith, they didn't think this was used for any purpose, with one respondent noting that they 'treat everyone the same'. 30% told us that women were asked their faith for monitoring or commissioning purposes. The most prevalent reason for asking women about their faith (33%) was to support women in a way unrelated to risk, for example finding a local place of worship if they had moved or being aware of relevant faith days. These aspects of women's needs can be important, for example to support a woman to practise her faith and integrate into a new community.

However, only four responses (10%) explicitly spoke about risk assessment and safety planning in relation to women's faith and their faith needs. Two of these responses noted that they assessed whether there was any risk related to 'honour'-based abuse, although spiritual abuse was not referenced by any of the respondents. This suggests that whilst a high percentage of respondents are asking women about their faith and faith needs, this information is largely not used to inform risk management or safety planning. This is at odds with the earlier assertion from 28% of respondents that they felt confident that they were always meeting the needs of women of faith.



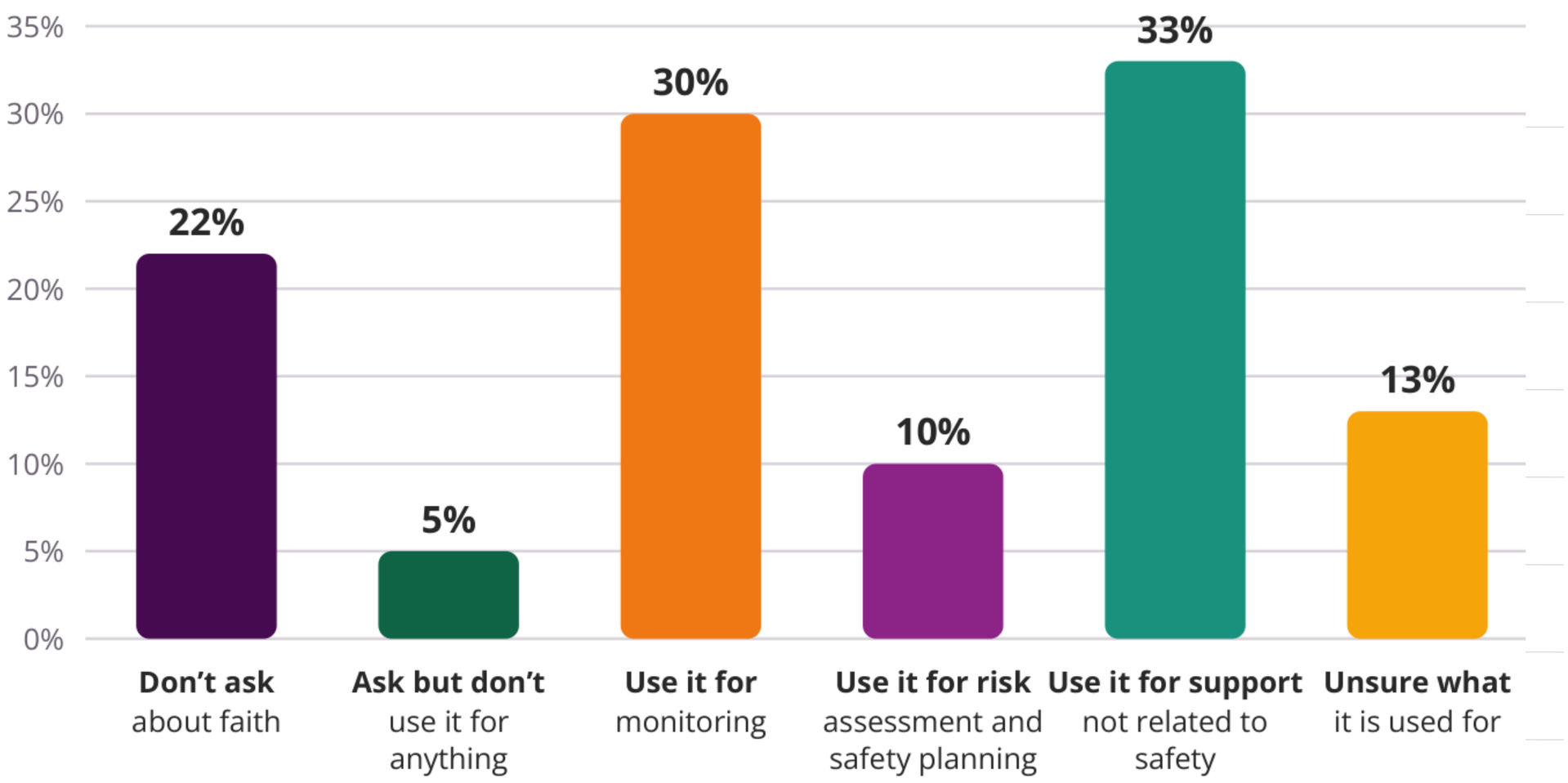


10%

Most services ask about faith (78%), but only four responses described using it in risk assessment and safety planning.

Our survey of 40 VAWG professionals

What services do with what they learn about a survivor's faith



Faith as a form of strength or a feature of safety planning was absent from the majority of responses. This could include taking a strengths-based approach to safety planning that draws on the survivor's faith, and if applicable her support network, whilst risk assessing the ways in which faith can be weaponised against survivors.

> **Faith as a form of strength or a feature of safety planning was absent from the majority of responses.**

Several people discussed their practice of exploring the role of women's faith in their lived experience, including how it intersected with other aspects of a survivor's identity, such as race, culture and LGBT+ identities. This suggests a more holistic approach to assessing a survivor's needs. As research illustrates that survivors from faith backgrounds fear secular

organisations won't understand them (Abrahams et al. 2019), exploring their experiences in detail is vital to providing appropriate support and safety.

Several respondents to our survey highlighted their lack of confidence in meeting the needs of survivors from faith backgrounds. Concerns included not knowing what to ask, a lack of training, or having had previous training but not feeling that practice-based advice was given. There was also a concern that they had knowledge of some faiths but not others, or that some were given preference within their service.

Other people used more open questioning about women's needs but did not directly ask about faith unless either the survivor brought it up themselves or it seemed particularly relevant. Although it is unclear what 'relevant' may mean in this context, this could indicate that faith is more likely to be discussed with survivors who display visible markers of their religion, or who are experiencing particular forms of VAWG, such as 'honour'-based abuse, which are often mistakenly equated with religious practices. One person stated that in their service there was a focus on ethnicity and immigration status but not faith. These approaches raise concerns as to whether the safeguarding needs of survivors from faith backgrounds are being met. It also suggests that for women whose faith is less visible, including survivors from White communities, faith may not be being explored at all.

Our members, many of whom work in the VAWG field, highlighted some of the barriers faced by women of faith when accessing support from agencies within the VAWG sector. One member noted that organisations within the sector were well placed to support women from faith backgrounds and to challenge religious fundamentalism but were often unable or unwilling to do so due to a lack of faith literacy, limiting women's access to justice and support. Overall, members highlighted that there was a lack of understanding of faith as both a source of strength and a barrier to accessing support.





Lack of knowledge within the VAWG sector creates barriers for women of faith

A lack of understanding of faith as a source of strength

A lack of understanding of faith as a barrier to accessing support

A lack of understanding of the role of faith in women's lives

A lack of understanding of spiritual abuse

A lack of understanding of the way faith interacts with immigration

A lack of understanding of religious marriages

Specific areas of knowledge were highlighted as lacking, including the role of faith in women's lives, the way faith interacts with immigration, spiritual abuse, and an understanding of religious marriages. Several members also noted that assumptions are often made about how women interact with their faith, for example, assuming that they will reject their faith because it has been weaponised as part of the abuse they have experienced. Another area highlighted was the lack of knowledge of spiritual abuse, which leads to an inability to provide appropriate support and safeguarding. With one study finding that 60% of Christian victim-survivors have experienced spiritual abuse (Oakley and Wright 2023), knowledge in this area is vital to understanding survivors' experiences.

Several members also emphasised that a lack of understanding of the faith-related needs of survivors can lead to unintentional victim-blaming, for example not understanding why women can't just leave abusive situations. It can also make it difficult to challenge the misogynistic interpretations of religion that are weaponised against women by perpetrators and patriarchal faith leaders, impacting women's ability to leave abusive relationships.

> **A lack of understanding of the faith-related needs of survivors can lead to unintentional victim-blaming.**





What can the VAWG sector do to support survivors of domestic abuse?

Our members suggested several key areas where professionals in the VAWG sector could improve practice to provide better support for survivors from faith backgrounds.

Improved faith literacy

The majority of members suggested ways to improve faith literacy. This included taking time to listen to individual women rather than make assumptions about their experiences and understanding that faith can have a role in some women's healing process. There was also a suggestion that professionals need to be careful not to equate culture or religion with abuse, as doing so normalises this connection. Instead, professionals need to think more broadly about how faith intersects with other characteristics, including race.

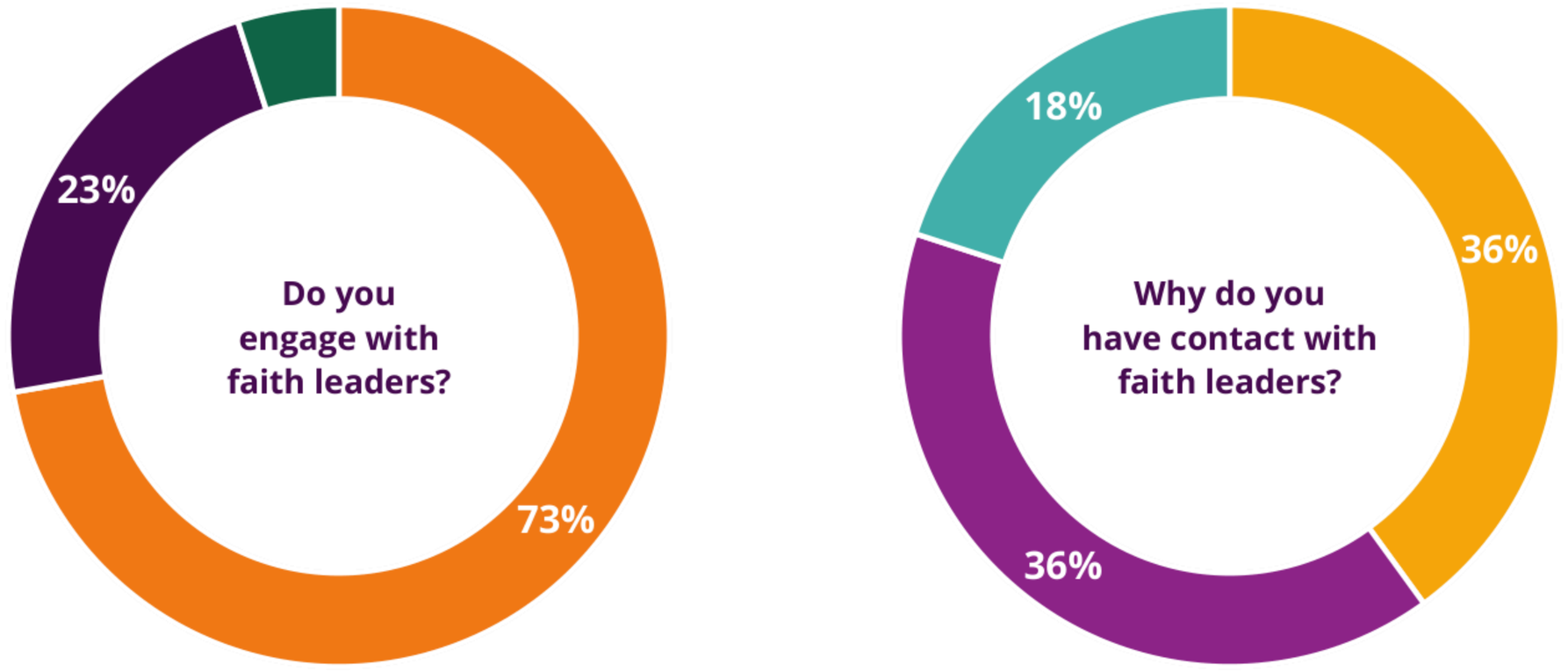
Whilst it was clear that there was no expectation that professionals should become experts on faith, gaining a better understanding of the barriers for women and the intersection of faith and VAWG was recommended. Training on spiritual abuse was particularly highlighted. Members also suggested closer working relationships with specialist faith and VAWG experts who hold this knowledge.

Work collaboratively with faith organisations

Our survey of the VAWG sector asked organisations whether they engage with faith leaders. 73% of respondents stated that they did not have contact with them at all, with 23% occasionally in contact and 5% regularly. Reasons for contact included support for survivors (36%), multi-agency working, for example on Safeguarding Adults Boards (36%) and outreach, collaboration and training (18%). A small number of agencies appeared to have very positive relationships with faith leaders, for example seeking advice on topics such as religious divorce or collaborating on risk management.







- No contact: 73%
- Occasional contact: 23%
- Regular contact: 5%
- Support for survivors: 36%
- Multi-agency working: 36%
- Outreach, collaboration and training: 18%

There are a number of compelling reasons why collaboration between VAWG sector professionals and faith leaders benefits survivors. Research shows that women of faith are more likely to approach faith leaders than other services when experiencing abuse (Cox 2015). However, survivors disclosing in faith settings are often not referred to specialist services for support (Oakley and Wright 2023).

The Faith and VAWG Coalition members surveyed highlighted that survivors are often caught between a lack of understanding of faith in the VAWG sector and a lack of understanding of VAWG in the faith sector, leaving them without appropriate support and in some cases a choice to make between faith and safety.

Survivors are often caught between a lack of understanding of faith in the VAWG sector and a lack of understanding of VAWG in the faith sector.

Therefore, a positive relationship between faith leaders and local support services with clear referral pathways can increase understanding and expedite referrals to appropriate services. Ideally, relationships between VAWG professionals and faith leaders or communities should be reciprocal and collaborative, with opportunities for both parties to gain greater

understanding of the barriers for women with the intent to improve safety and outcomes for them.

Members also highlighted the need for VAWG organisations to work more closely with, and refer into, faith-specialist 'by and for' agencies. Several respondents stressed that there is no requirement for VAWG agencies to be experts in faith or religion, but that working with specialist agencies would be beneficial to their practice. Another suggestion for collaborative working was for VAWG agencies to offer training to faith leaders on domestic abuse.





Conclusion

The Faith and VAWG Coalition believes that all survivors of VAWG deserve support and safeguarding. However, survivors from faith backgrounds are rarely addressed in policy and practice guidance, and they face considerable barriers to accessing support.

Responses from faith leaders are particularly important, given that women of faith are more likely to disclose within faith institutions than to statutory services. For some women, faith leaders and communities can be a powerful source of practical, emotional and spiritual support. However, other women experience disbelief, collusion or even increased harm. Faith leaders can play an important role not only in supporting survivors but in holding perpetrators to account and creating attitudinal change within the wider faith community, though many lack the tools, knowledge, resources and capacity to enact and meet the demands of this role.

Whilst women may experience a lack of understanding of VAWG in faith spaces, this can be compounded by a lack of understanding of their faith in VAWG spaces. Many mainstream agencies have limited understanding of how faith can act as both a source of support and a mechanism to abuse women, leading to a lack of integration of the role of faith into safety planning and risk assessing. Women of faith may be hesitant to engage with mainstream agencies, fearing that, at best, there will be limited understanding of their experiences and, at worst, they will face discrimination. Some women face assumptions about their faith, are misidentified as belonging to the wrong faith, or, in the case of White and White-passing women, face a lack of understanding that they have faith at all.

We would encourage both faith agencies and VAWG agencies to approach their work with survivors from faith backgrounds with an openness to learning about their experiences, whilst acting on safeguarding concerns in partnership with the survivor. We understand that both sectors often provide essential services under great strain and with limited resources, and often have to step in to compensate for a lack of state support. Collaboration between sectors can improve knowledge and referral pathways for women experiencing abuse. We encourage both faith leaders and mainstream VAWG agencies to engage with faith-based VAWG services that hold specialist knowledge, although we are aware that these agencies are often drastically underfunded.





Recommendations

The recommendations below point to clear, actionable priorities for VAWG services, faith leaders, government and local commissioners. Foremost among them are building faith literacy across the sector, strengthening referral pathways between faith and statutory systems, and ensuring survivors from faith backgrounds are not excluded from safety planning and safeguarding responses.

For the VAWG sector

1. Avoid assuming who has a faith. Ask all survivors whether they have faith needs, irrespective of ethnicity or visible faith markers. As part of risk assessment and safety planning, explore with survivors the role faith may play, both as a source of support and as a potential mechanism of abuse.

2. Explore with survivors how faith intersects with other characteristics and experiences, including but not limited to sexuality, ethnicity, disability, immigration status and gender.

3. Access spiritual abuse training carried out by expert agencies.

4. Build and maintain relationships with specialist faith and VAWG agencies.

5. Build and maintain relationships and referral pathways with faith leaders.





FOR FAITH LEADERS AND COMMUNITIES

1. Look up your local domestic abuse and specialist faith and VAWG organisations, and support survivors to access them. They can be found on every local authority/council website.

2. Build and maintain relationships with domestic abuse and specialist faith and VAWG agencies to share expertise on faith and on VAWG.

3. Access training on domestic abuse and harmful practices delivered by domestic abuse and violence against women and girls specialists.

4. Make VAWG visible in faith and social gatherings, e.g. through sermons and communal worship, and publicly condemn all forms of abuse.

5. Make it clear in faith and social gatherings that misogyny and harm are not acceptable.

6. Recognise and name that scripture is sometimes used to abuse women. Support survivors by providing alternative interpretations or scriptures that illustrate how harm is unacceptable in your faith tradition.

FOR GOVERNMENT

Commission a national faith-literate framework equipping both statutory services and faith institutions to respond to VAWG. See our VAWG Strategy briefing for detailed recommendations:
Read the briefing at faithandvawg.org/publications

FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Fund spiritual abuse training as a core part of the local VAWG training offer, delivered by specialist, 'by and for', faith-literate VAWG agencies.





Glossary

‘By and for’ ending VAWG organisations, or ‘by and for’ agencies

Ending VAWG ‘by and for’ services are those who are specialists in VAWG and are staffed and run by the community they serve. Imkaan’s definition of ‘by and for’ agencies can be found at www.imkaan.org.uk/by-and-for. They are often referred to as ‘by and for’ agencies.

Co-ordinated Community Response (CCR)

The CCR is an approach to domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG which involves bringing communities together to improve the safety of survivors and their children and hold abusers to account. Often the CCR is used to mean statutory and non-statutory agencies working together, but a successful CCR needs to involve a wide range of communities and individuals, including faith communities. To be effective the CCR needs to work to improve the safety of all victim-survivors, including those from marginalised and minoritised communities.

Faith-based VAWG ‘by and for’ organisations

Faith-based VAWG ‘by and for’ organisations, like all ‘by and for’ agencies, are staffed and run by the same communities that they serve, in this case specific faith communities.

Faith leaders

The Coalition uses the term faith leaders in its most inclusive sense. This includes leaders who are formally trained and those communally recognised as having credibility and influence. This therefore includes women and young people.

Spiritual abuse

The term spiritual abuse does not have an agreed definition and is used to refer to a range of types of abuse linked to faith, including abuse perpetrated within domestic abuse, child abuse and more widely in faith settings. The Faith and VAWG Coalition defines spiritual abuse as ‘a tool of power and control that can present as a form of domestic abuse and an exacerbating factor in physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, which uses religion, culture and faith systems to control and subjugate a victim. It is often characterised by a systemic pattern of coercive or controlling behaviour that can take place within a faith and/or spiritual context.’ For more information, see our guidance: *Addressing Spiritual Abuse in Ending Violence Against Women and Girls*.

White-passing

Describes someone whose physical appearance leads others to perceive them as White and part of the UK’s ethnic majority, even where their actual heritage, culture or faith differs. This report uses the term to highlight how visible markers (or their absence) can shape whether practitioners ask about a survivor’s faith, meaning White-passing survivors from faith backgrounds may be overlooked precisely because they don’t fit assumptions about who has a faith.





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FAITH AND VAWG COALITION

About the Faith and VAWG Coalition

We are the UK's independent authority on faith literacy in VAWG. We up-skill the VAWG sector and equip faith organisations so survivors of faith are understood and protected, without having to choose between safety and belief.

For VAWG services

Practical training, including on spiritual abuse, and tools that build faith literacy into risk assessment and safety planning.

For faith organisations

Safeguarding training that aligns faith traditions with safeguarding responsibilities, clear referral pathways and confidential case guidance.

For funders and policymakers

A trusted, single interface between faith bodies and the VAWG sector. Fund change that reaches the survivors others can't.

Connect with us

Join our network, book training, partner with us or support our work with a donation.

Website www.faithandvawg.org

Email hello@faithandvawg.org

Charity no. 1206961

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