



Faith-based Initiative

The purpose of the faith-based initiative is to understand what the key issues are for women who are survivors of domestic violence in relation to their faith. Often women who we serve find their strength and comfort from their religious faiths during their time of darkness. Understanding how religious organizations and communities address domestic violence can be integral to providing further support for survivors.

Sakhi's Faith-based Initiative focuses on three arenas: research and resource compilation of faith-based programs, leaders, and resources; a compilation of survivors' beliefs and thoughts on issues of faith; and, cultivation of partnership and collaboration within different faith communities.

Sakhi conducted a survey for survivors on the role of faith in their lives as women who had experienced domestic violence. A significant number, 53, survivors completed the survey making it one of the most popular surveys the organization has sent out.

Key findings from this survey include:

- Although 76% of the respondents answered that they used their faith as a source of strength, only 10% confided in their religious communities/leaders about the abuse that they had experienced.
- When asked if Sakhi does faith-based work, responses included the following remarks:

"I've attended a few (Sakhi) support groups where women were talking about how their religion has been their biggest strength amidst all the violence. Sakhi has provided the tool for women to talk about the strengths in their lives."

"I believe Sakhi shouldn't get involved in religious communities. Sakhi should make its own secular community where everyone will be above the religion. I believe humanism is more than religion, casteism and racism. Sakhi should continue its work as they are doing everything, above everything."
- In the next year, Sakhi will facilitate focus groups with survivors to gain more detailed information about survivors' experiences with faith. From these focus groups, Sakhi hopes to develop a defined faith-based initiative that welcomes all survivors to participate in a discussion of how faith does/does not provide them strength and healing as well as craft an agenda to enable faith and faith communities to respond to domestic violence.
- Currently, Sakhi is carrying out a survey among clergy leaders in the NYC area. The clergy survey assesses clergy leaders' experiences with domestic violence issues in their congregations. It is the beginning of a larger conversation as part of Sakhi's ongoing work to engage community members in discussing ways to end domestic violence.

If you have any questions about Sakhi's Faith-based Initiative, please contact Fatma Zahra, Domestic Violence Program Advocate, at (212) 714-9153 ext. 108 or fatma.zahra@sakhi.org.