

Domestic Violence in Middle Eastern & North African (MENA) Communities

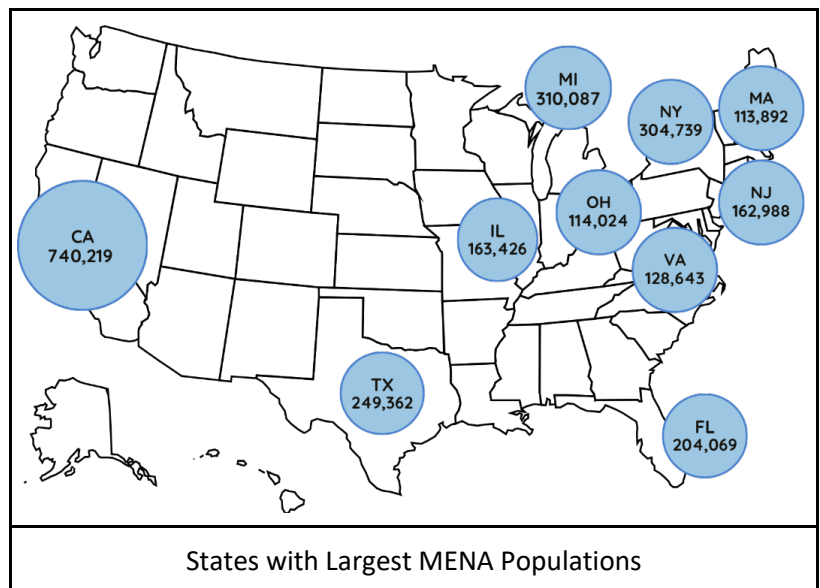
Summer 2025

Background

The 2020 Census marked the first federal level collection of culturally specific MENA race/ethnicity data;¹ 3.5 million people identified with MENA heritage.¹ Ethnic groups within MENA populations from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, UAE, and Yemen.²

Community Snapshot²

- California, Michigan, and New York had the largest MENA populations.³
- Compared to any other states, California had twice as many people (740,219) identifying as MENA alone or in any combination.³
- The three largest groups, Lebanese, Iranian, and Egyptians populations make up almost one half of the MENA population in the U.S.³



¹ Before the 2020 Census, the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) category was included within the White racial category but since then, the OMB updated Race/Ethnicity standards to better capture the needs of MENA communities in the U.S.

² For more information about the different MENA subgroups, see the following [webpage](#). For a more detailed look at county-level concentrations of MENA immigrant communities in the US, please see the Migration Policy Institute's recent [report](#).

- In 2021, 2.2 million MENA immigrants made up 4.9% of the total foreign-born population in the U.S.⁴
- About 58% of the MENA population residing in the United States were foreign-born.⁴
- About 70% of MENA immigrants were naturalized citizens, compared to 53% of the total foreign-born population⁴
- Many individuals of MENA descent are part of the Islamic, Christian, and Judaic faith⁵ and may identify as Christian Arabs, Jewish Arab, Muslim, or more with their specific faith or ethnic group (for example: members of the Coptic church, the Druze faith, Orthodox Christian church, etc.)³

Recent Statistics on Domestic Violence

Prevalence and Forms of DV

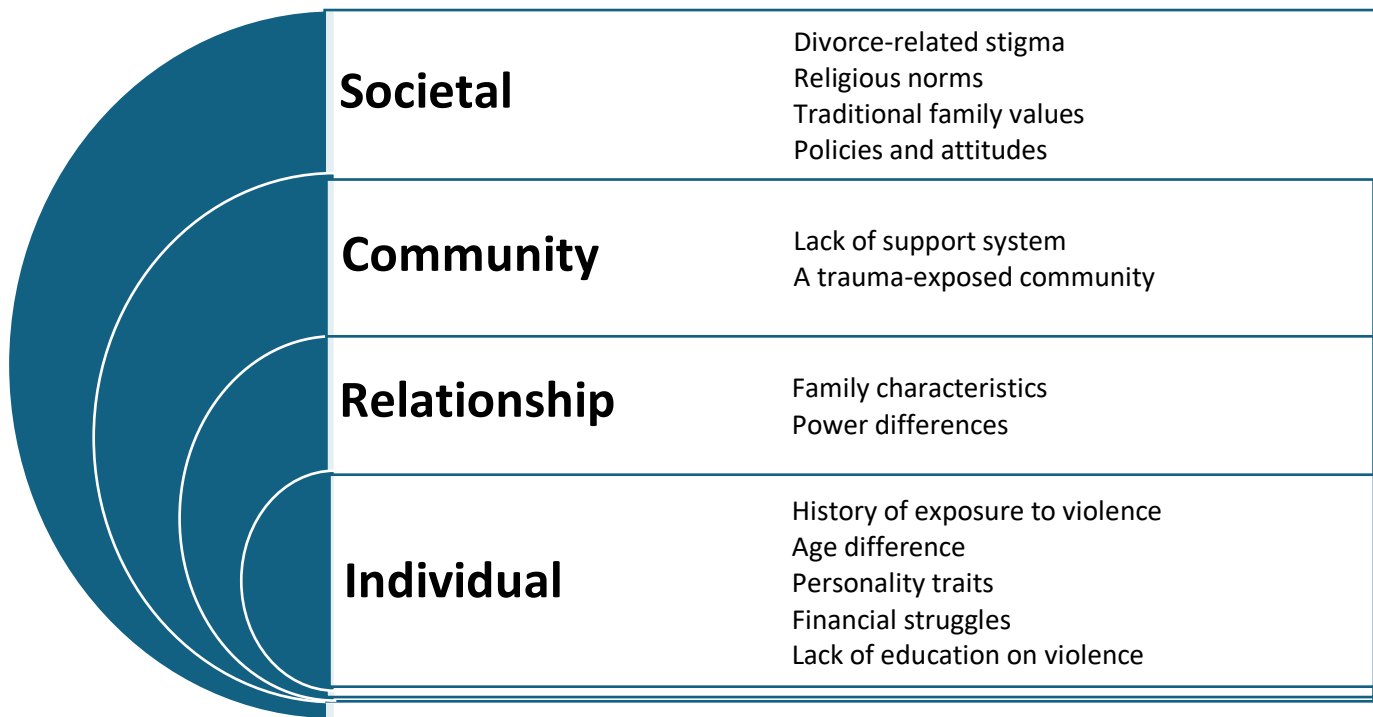
- Larger nationally representative surveys, such as the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), lack a distinct MENA category, limiting accurate national and state-level estimates of domestic violence and sexual assault in these communities. There is even less data on North African communities within the MENA umbrella. However, a few smaller-scale community studies conducted in cities with larger concentrations of Arab and Middle Eastern populations, such as Detroit and Chicago, provide some prevalence information.
- A qualitative study (2016-2017) explored Arab American perspectives on DV in Dearborn, Michigan. Focus groups and interviews with 36 participants indicated emotional abuse was most common and seen as a precursor to physical abuse. Physical abuse was also acknowledged as a concern, while sexual abuse was viewed as less common and too sensitive for open discussion.⁶
- A 2022 study conducted in the Chicagoland area found that 76.3% of young Arab adults aged 18-25 in their sample reported psychological DV victimization.⁷
- In a 2023 community health survey of Massachusetts, 45.5% of Middle Eastern or North African adults aged 18 and older reported experiencing domestic violence at least once in their lifetime.⁸
- In a sample of 55 Iraqi women in the Metro Detroit area in 2011, 7% reported never having been exposed to any kind of abuse by their partner, 93% reported one type of controlling behavior during their lifetime, 76% of those women surveyed indicating exposure to threatening behavior, and 80% reported a physical assault by an intimate partner in their lifetime.⁹

³ See the following [module on Arab Americans and Religion](#) for more detailed religious and ethnic communities.



Risk and Protective Factors

- According to a 2019 scoping review, in MENA communities, DV risk factors for women included the following factors: younger age, less education, a longer marriage duration, a history of childhood abuse/witnessing family violence, living in the rural region, and a lower income level had a higher risk of exposure to DV.¹⁰
- For asylum seekers of all ethnic backgrounds, a lack of in-language resource, legal protections, and pending documentation status all are associated with increased risk for experiencing SA and DV overall.¹¹
- In a 2025 study, Arab American adults aged 18-25 identified the following factors that contribute to DV:¹²



Mental and Physical Health Impacts

- Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African communities experience a form of invisibility due to inaccurate census data. This invisibility is accompanied by unaddressed health needs and an increased risk for domestic violence.¹³
- In a 2014 cross-sectional study of 312 Arab American women aged 19 and older, women who were at risk for experiencing domestic violence were more likely to experience depression in comparison to lower-risk women. They also found that women who had spent more years in the United States tested with lower depression scores than newly arrived Arab American women¹⁴

Help-Seeking and Barriers to Support

- In the same 2014 study, researchers found Arab American women aged 19 and older who lived in the United States for longer were unlikely to experience barriers to services.¹⁴
- Arabic-speaking communities often seek support from faith leaders, family, friends, and fellow community members before seeking formal services.¹⁵
- Arab women may not disclose their experiences of abuse to their family due to strong cultural forces that reinforce a woman's responsibility to obey her husband's instructions and will.¹⁶
- Newly arrived MENA youth tended to seek professional help, whereas individuals who had spent longer time in the U.S. were more likely to go to their friends for support.¹⁷

Promising Practices and Recommendations

- Cultural resources show promise in shaping how MENA youth cope with a variety of stressors from family, peers, and online. Community-driven, participatory research such as Photovoice can uncover local needs while engaging young people.¹⁷
- Mental health approaches that are client-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally informed can better address the needs of Middle Easterner and North African survivors who already experience a stigma against seeking mental health services.¹⁸

Select Translated Materials

- Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence ([English](#); [Arabic](#); [Dari](#); [Farsi](#); [Pashto](#)) | API-GBV
- Creating a Safety Plan ([English](#); [Arabic](#); [French](#)) | Peel Committee Against Woman Abuse
- Materials on domestic violence in over 115 languages | [Hot Peach Pages](#)

Resources

Crisis Services

- **[National Domestic Violence Hotline](#):** Provides 24/7 free and confidential support, including crisis intervention, DV education, safety planning, and referrals to local service providers. Assistance is available in English, Spanish, and 200+ other languages through interpreter services.

Live Chat: www.thehotline.org | Call: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) | Text: START to 88788.

- **[Love is Respect](#):** Offers 24/7 free and confidential support for teens, young adults, and their loved ones seeking help or information about healthy relationships and dating abuse.

Live Chat: www.loveisrespect.org | Call: 1-866-331-9474 | Text: LOVEIS to 22522



- **National Sexual Assault Hotline**: Provides victims of sexual assault with 27/7 access to free, confidential services.

Live Chat: <http://online.rainn.org> | Call: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

Directories

- **Directory of Domestic Violence Programs Serving Asians, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders** including MENA-serving programs and organizations | API-GBV
- **International List of Sexual & Domestic Violence Agencies** | Hot Peach Pages

Training and Technical Assistance

- **Peaceful Families Project**: Peaceful Families Project is a Philadelphia-based initiative dedicated to ending domestic violence in Muslim families through training, research, resource development, and strategic Muslim representation. For training requests, and technical assistance related to domestic violence and sexual assault, workshops for Muslim leaders and communities, cultural sensitivity trainings and technical assistance for professionals, conducting research, and other resources, visit their [website](#), submit a [training request](#), or use the following contact information:

Call: (540) 324-8818 | Email: info@peacefulfamilies.org

- **Sauti Yetu Center for African Women**: Sauti Yetu is a community-based social services organization dedicated to uplifting African and other immigrant women and families by championing their needs, rights, and voices. The Center offers domestic violence and sexual assault services, legal assistance, and assistance with basic needs support and health care to Bronx and throughout New York City. Staff can provide services in more than 10 languages, including but not limited to English, French, Arabic, Bambara, Igbo, Wolof, Mandinka and Soninke. For more information or to partner with Sauti Yetu, visit their [website](#) or connect through the following contact information:

Call: 718-665-2486 | Fax: 718-665-2483 | Email: info@sautiyetunyc.org

- **Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence**: For questions, information, publications, training requests, and technical assistance related to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and/or stalking in Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) and Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) communities, visit www.api-gbv.org or email info@api-gbv.org



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