

Understanding Cultural and Spiritual Abuse

Cultural abuse involves using someone's cultural background, traditions, or community connections to shame, isolate, or control them. This can include disrespecting cultural practices, mocking traditions, or preventing someone from expressing their cultural identity.

This type of abuse may occur as part of an ongoing pattern, where the abuser **criticizes, shames, or belittles** their partner's spiritual or cultural identity in order to gain power and control. It can be subtle or overt, but its impact is deeply personal and harmful.

Cultural and spiritual abuse can deeply affect a person's sense of self, belonging, and identity. It may lead to feelings of isolation, shame, disconnection from family or community, and a loss of cultural or spiritual grounding—all of which can impact mental health and healing.

WHAT CAN CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL ABUSE LOOK LIKE?

- Being **forbidden to speak in your first language**, or prevented from speaking it with your children.
- Being **denied access to your place of worship**, religious community, or people who share your beliefs.
- Not being allowed to **celebrate religious holidays** or attend cultural events.
- Being **forced to convert** to a religion you do not believe in, or having your lack of faith used against you.
- Being threatened with **spiritual or cultural harm**, such as through the use of black magic or other belief-based intimidation.
- Being **forced to participate in religious practices** against your will.
- Having **religious texts, teachings, or leaders used** to justify control or abuse.
- Being **coerced into a marriage** you do not want.
- Being **prevented from returning to your homeland, Country, or cultural roots**.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO PRACTICE YOUR FAITH AND CULTURE

You have the right to express your culture, beliefs, and identity without fear or control. If you are experiencing this kind of abuse, there are support services that respect your cultural and spiritual background. You don't have to face this alone.

Your **spiritual and cultural identity** is an important part of who you are. No one has the right to control, diminish, or take that away from you. Abuse of this kind is serious and can be deeply damaging—but **you are not alone**, and **you are not to blame**.

HELP IS AVAILABLE

- Talk to someone you trust—whether a friend, elder, community leader, or support worker.
- Seek culturally safe and trauma-informed support services.
- If safe to do so, document instances of control or abuse.
- You can contact DVNQ for confidential help.

